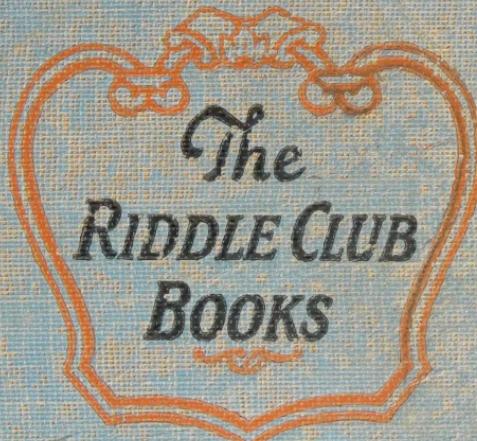


The RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADYBROOK



ALICE DALE HARDY



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"GIVE US AN EASY RIDDLER," BEGGED WARD.
The Riddle Club at Shadybrook. Frontispiece—(Page 175)

THE RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADYBROOK

Why They Went There
What Happened on the Way
And What Occurred During Their Absence
from Home

BY
ALICE DALE HARDY

AUTHOR OF "THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME," "THE RIDDLE CLUB
IN CAMP," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
WALTER S. ROGERS

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BY ALICE DALE HARDY

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THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP
THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS
THE RIDDLE CLUB AT SUNRISE BEACH
THE RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADYBROOK

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The Riddle Club at Shadybrook

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THE RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADBROOK

CHAPTER I

BANK DEPOSITORS

"I DON'T see why we have to wait," said Artie Marley, for the twentieth time in as many minutes.

"I'm sure I've told you," his sister Polly answered, not impatiently, but vaguely.

Polly was twisted about in a rather awkward position, trying to see the heels of her pretty tan pumps.

"We have to wait—you know we have to wait," said Polly, apparently deciding her heels were all right, "we have to wait——" Her voice trailed off and she disappeared into the hall, the screen door clicking smartly behind her.

Artie tried to moan. At the same time he allowed himself to fall from a sitting position flat

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to the porch floor. But his head struck the unsympathetic and extremely bristly doormat, and he sat up in time to see a short, fat lad carefully picking his way across the street.

"Hello, Ward!" called Artie cheerfully. "Come on over."

As Ward Larue was coming over anyway, the invitation was a trifle useless, but the fat boy accepted it more as a greeting than an invitation and waved pleasantly in return.

"Gee, you've got your good suit on," Artie said, inspecting his visitor closely as he mounted the porch steps.

"So have you," said Ward, taking out his handkerchief and dusting a small square of the porch floor, after which precautionary measure he slowly and carefully sat down.

"Where's Jess?" Artie demanded, pulling his own pocket handkerchief a little more out of his breast pocket and glancing at its blue and white border with manifest pride.

"Dolling up," grinned Ward. "Guess Polly is, too."

"I like that—when I've been ready for perfect ages!" Polly cried, stepping out on the porch and settling herself in the swing.

It was noticeable that all the young people seemed to wish to preserve their starched neat-

ness and that they zealously avoided the usual contacts with railings and flower boxes. Polly was in blue and white gingham and her dark head was brushed till each hair lay in ordered, shining symmetry. Artie and Ward were in a state of cleanliness and good-grooming that was not quite natural to boys of their age and lively disposition, and when three more children presently mounted the steps, they, too, were obviously dressed for an occasion.

"Margy Williamson, you've put on your new pink linen!" said Polly.

"Well, it's very plain," Margy defended herself. "I hope I wouldn't wear a fussy dress. Carrie Pepper or Mattie Helms would put on white lace and pink sashes, but I hope I have more sense."

Jess Larue, a thin, dark girl, giggled. She wore a pretty gingham dress, a yellow and white check. She sat down beside her brother without bothering to dust the boards first.

"Fred, have you got it?" asked Jess suddenly. Automatically Fred's hand went to his pocket and then he frowned.

"What do you take me for?" he demanded sternly. "Think I'd turn up at the bank without it?"

Jess did not seem disconcerted.

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"I guess stranger things than that have happened," she informed him composedly. "Once, when my father and mother were visiting in the city, they went to the theater and my father had left the tickets at home on the bureau. He had to go back and get them. So, you see, it does happen."

It was Ward's turn to giggle.

"When our treasurer shows up without a check that is for the Riddle Club, you'll know that it isn't the check he's lost, but his mind," he announced.

"It's a good thing for this club there is a treasurer," said Fred. "If I didn't pry the dues out of you——"

"Polly, stop him," implored Margy Williamson, Fred's sister. "Once he gets to talking about dues, we're in for an hour's lecture."

"Well, why don't we go?" Artie, who was the youngest and perhaps the most impatient of the group, urged. "What are we waiting for?"

"He's been saying that since eight o'clock this morning," explained Polly.

Artie leaped to his feet, nearly knocking over the roly-poly Ward, who was built like a ball and had about as much balance.

"I heard the clock!" cried Artie dramatically.

"I heard the clock! It struck the quarter hour, and that means it's quarter past ten. It will be half past by the time we get to the bank. Come on, folks, hurry."

The others laughed, but Polly called through the screen door:

"We're going, Mother—it's quarter past!"

Mrs. Marley came to the door and peered through the wire netting at them.

"I suppose you can't stand it another minute," she observed good-naturedly. "Run along then, but do keep out of the sun. This heat is terrific."

"We feel it more, because it was so cool on the island," said Polly, as the six friends set out on their walk uptown.

"My, wasn't the house hot when we went into it," Jess sighed. "All I could think of was the fun we had going swimming afternoons."

The boys hurried the girls a little more than was strictly comfortable, but as they were all anxious to reach the River Bend National Bank, no one complained. The doors of the brick and limestone building were open when they mounted the wide steps and Artie, who had been clamoring from breakfast on to get here, suddenly had stage fright and stepped behind his sister Polly.

"If it isn't the Riddle Club!" said the bank

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teller, leaning forward to look through his window grating at the six small figures lined up solemnly before him.

"We're making a deposit," Fred told him proudly, pushing a slip and a check through the window with an important air.

The teller smiled as he picked up the slips of paper, but the next moment his expression changed to one of surprise.

"A hundred dollars!" he exclaimed. "What in the world!"

The Riddle Club beamed upon him.

"It's for the Club account," said Fred.

"We got it from Captain Mooney," Polly chimed in.

"It's the reward for saving Ella." This from Margy.

"Finding her, you mean," Jess corrected.

Ward and Artie nodded, as though they meant to support the others, even if they were temporarily speechless themselves.

It was so early that no other customers were in the bank. The teller's interest in the hundred dollar check attracted the attention of the other bank officers and presently they were all grouped around the window listening while Polly and Fred explained how they had found a little girl on an island and received the money as the reward of-

ferred by her distracted father for information leading to her safe return.

"So that's what you were doing up at Sunrise Beach," the teller commented, as he returned the Club pass-book to Fred with the beautiful entry, "100" written boldly in the right space.

"That'll give the Conundrum Club something to think about, eh?" smiled gray-haired Mr. Howard, the bank president.

Polly looked a little startled. She had not known that Mr. Howard knew of the existence of the two clubs.

"Know all about you," the president chuckled, following them to the door. "Any organization that saves its funds as you do is bound to succeed. You'll be one of River Bend's strongest societies one of these days, if I am not mistaken."

"Now, you see?" said Fred significantly, as they went down the steps. "That comes from saving our money. I hope you'll remember what Mr. Howard said the next time you are asked to bear parting with ten cents."

Polly laughed, and the others were so used to hearing Fred talk about the club dues that they hardly listened.

"Don't you think it's funny," Margy Williamson asked, with the sisterly disregard of a brother's remark that often prevails in the best of

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families, "that we had to come back from the beach in such a hurry?"

"That's what Carrie Pepper said," snickered Jess. "She told me she thought it was very odd we had to leave in the middle of the summer. She is going to stay up till the day before school opens."

"Let her," Artie commented, sending a stone spinning with a skillful motion of his foot. "River Bend will be a nice place without her."

"Good as a summer resort," agreed Fred.

Polly hated to "hear ill of the absent," as her mother often said, and now she tried gently to bring the discussion back to Margy's original assertion.

"I thought we were going to stay several weeks longer," said Polly thoughtfully. "Perhaps—perhaps—" She broke off her sentence and Artie looked at her fretfully.

"I don't see why you never finish what you're going to say," he complained. "I think you ought to—ought to—" but his own sentence remained unfinished and he, too, began to stare.

The remaining members of the Riddle Club followed the direction of Polly and Artie's gaze. Ward's mouth fell open and Fred pretended to tumble back on his sister in a faint.

"Do you see what I see?" he demanded feebly.

"It's Carrie Pepper!" whispered Polly.

"Well, I'm sure you needn't whisper—she can't hear you," Margy observed, a bit tartly. She was the most matter-of-fact of them all and seldom allowed herself to be startled. "Carrie Pepper always does everything we do, and I suppose she just had to come home to see what we were up to next."

The Pepper family and their trunks were whirled around the corner. Though the yards of the Peppers and the Larues joined, the entrance to Carrie's home was on another street. After this the Riddle Club continued on its way a little more silently than usual.

"Jess, there's your father's car—he must be in our house," cried Polly, as they came abreast of the comfortable old-fashioned house that was home to Polly Marley and her brother.

"Come on in," the hospitable Artie invited the others, and they trooped up the walk.

"Here they are," said Mr. Larue, who was sitting on the porch railing.

The Riddle Club was finding this an altogether surprising morning. It was most unusual to find two busy fathers sitting on a porch during the morning hours, and still stranger to see two

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mothers sitting in a porch swing and "not doing a thing," as Artie later described it.

"My mother always sews," he explained when Jess tried to find out what he meant.

"You're just in time, youngsters," Mr. Marley greeted them. "We have something to tell you, and it concerns you more or less."

"Something has happened," said Mrs. Larue, stroking the hair out of Jess's eyes, into which it *would* tumble, in spite of the red ribbon band she wore.

Artie spoke heavily, out of a very full heart.

"Carrie Pepper has come back," he announced.

There was a burst of laughter, and Artie's father patted him sympathetically on his shoulder.

"I have something even more important than that to tell you," he declared. "In fact, quite an important announcement to make."

Mr. Larue cleared his throat and his eyes sought Mr. Marley's.

"I have something to tell you, too," he said.

Pretty Mrs. Marley laughed a little, as the six young faces puckered in earnest concentration.

"Arthur, don't get them all stirred up," she pleaded. "Polly, you needn't be worried, dear child. Daddy hasn't his plans quite all thought out, but we don't think it is wise to keep still any longer."

Fred and Margy exchanged glances.

"If it's secret or anything," said Fred bravely, though a trifle awkwardly, "and you want Margy and me to go——"

"Mercy, no, Fred!" Mrs. Larue assured him. "We want you and Margy among those present. You're concerned in this, too. Besides, here come your father and mother."

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson came across the lawn and took the chairs Artie dragged forward, obedient to a glance from his father. The Riddle Club began to feel a bit excited. Something was going to happen!

CHAPTER II

SURPRISE PLANS

"You see, children," began Mr. Marley, when Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were seated, "we didn't tell you what brought us all home so suddenly from Sunrise Beach. We had planned to let you spend the rest of the summer there, but something came up that changed every plan."

The Riddle Club waited breathless, but respectful.

"It's a little difficult for me to explain," went on Mr. Marley, in his kind, even voice, "but I think you'll understand that older folk have business matters which often demand their attention, but which can not be discussed outside the family. When the news came that Russell Carlos was dead, we didn't feel that the news should be public property at the beach."

"Have any of you ever heard of Russell Carlos?" asked Mr. Larue suddenly.

Five heads were shaken in emphatic negation, but Artie demurred.

"I think I read about him in a book," he offered.

The Riddle Club thought this quite likely, for Artie had read an amazing number of books of all kinds. But Mr. Marley only laughed.

"Russell Carlos," he said, "was the grandfather of a man Mr. Larue and I once helped in a business way. It wasn't much of a favor—we thought nothing of it at the time—but the man never forgot it. The grandson must have magnified the service, and we've since heard that he talked of it continuously.

"The grandson has been dead fifteen years, and now the old grandfather has passed on and he's left quite a bit of money to Mr. and Mrs. Larue and Mr. and Mrs. Marley," finished Mr. Marley.

The Riddle Club continued to stare.

"Did—did he leave you a million dollars?" ventured the dazed Artie.

"Not exactly," Mr. Marley returned, smiling. "But we heard that he has divided his entire estate between our two families."

"My!" sighed Margy, trying to digest this wonderful news. "Money just seems to be everywhere, doesn't it?"

She was thinking of the check the Riddle Club had just deposited and was quite unprepared for the shout of laughter which greeted her remark.

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"Wait!" said Mr. Larue mysteriously. "There is more!"

"More money?" Artie hinted. "It would be nice if he left some to Mr. and Mrs. Williamson."

"Heart of gold, is it any wonder that——" began Mrs. Williamson, but stopped at a signal from Mr. Larue.

Every one stopped talking too soon, thought Artie, who had his fair share of curiosity.

"The exciting part is to come," said Mr. Larue. "It is necessary for the legatees to go to Nova Scotia."

"Nova Scotia!" cried Polly, astonished.

"Russell Carlos lived there," Mr. Larue explained. "And it seems there is considerable legal red tape to be gone through with before the estate can be closed. So Mr. and Mrs. Marley and Mr. and Mrs. Larue face the prospect of a trip to Nova Scotia very shortly if they want to gain possession of this fortune."

"I'm crazy to see Nova Scotia," said Jess, with a beaming smile.

"There is still more to tell," her mother declared. "We can't take you children—it's unthinkable. Aside from the expense, the journey is long and tedious, and there will be very little time for pleasure. We can't stay away one minute longer than is strictly necessary, because of the

business right here in River Bend. No, Jess, you children will have to stay at home this time."

"We can't go!" cried Ward, in dismay.

"Do we have to stay at home alone?" This from Polly.

"I wouldn't like that—much," added Artie.

Mrs. Williamson who had been rocking and listening, stopped the steady motion of her chair.

"Fred and Margy don't know it, but they are going to have company," she said quickly. "You're coming to our house, Polly and Artie and Jess and Ward. And if we don't have enough fun to make up to you for the loss of a trip to Nova Scotia, why I'll speak to Fred and Margy—that I will!"

"Gee, won't that be great?" demanded Fred of the world at large. But a perfect babble of tongues drowned out his exclamation.

Every one began to talk at once, and in the midst of the general excitement a word about the Riddle Club may not come amiss.

Quite possibly you've met them before, in the first book of the series, called "The Riddle Club at Home." In that book the club was organized, with Polly Marley as president, Fred Williamson as treasurer, his sister Margy as secretary, and Jess and Artie and Ward perfectly contented as vice-presidents.

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The Riddle Club prospered and the members grew more clannish with each passing meeting. They went camping in a body, came home to a happy winter in their home town of River Bend, and, in the fourth volume about them, entitled, "The Riddle Club at Sunrise Beach" they spent some glorious happy weeks together at the shore and made new friends, among them the Captain Mooney who had presented them with the one hundred dollars for their club bank account.

As Polly Marley said, when they finally understood that they were to stay at home while their parents made the long trip to Nova Scotia, "it wouldn't really be much fun unless we could all go. And six girls and boys are too many to take traveling."

As long as the Riddle Club's entire membership was to stay in River Bend, they could not grumble, thought Polly.

"I don't see where you are going to put so many children," worried kind Mrs. Larue. "But you're making the trip possible. We couldn't go off at such short notice and leave the children with any one else in town."

"The more the merrier," Mr. Williamson chuckled, tickling Artie, who sat nearest to him. "I'm thinking of going out and borrowing a few more kids, just to make the collection complete."

A round dozen of children has always been my idea of a nice number to have around the house."

Mrs. Marley said that she thought Mrs. Williamson would find half that number enough, but Polly was turning over something else in her mind.

"You said 'short notice,' Mrs. Larue," Polly repeated.

"So I did, dear," declared that bright-eyed lady. "We're going just as soon as we can get reservations on the express train to New York. Probably in two or three days."

But when Mr. Marley came home to supper that night he announced that it would be nearly a week before they could leave—six days, to be exact.

"I think it would be a good plan to hold a meeting of the Riddle Club to-morrow morning," announced Polly, when she heard this. "We have missed one regular meeting. Mother said the dressmaker is coming, and I think we won't bother any one out in the barn."

"You wouldn't 'bother' me anywhere you might happen to be, Polly," Mrs. Marley said affectionately, "but I do think a meeting of the club will occupy your minds and keep the boys amused. There are so many odds and ends to attend to that I declare I don't know what to do first."

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"Make the children help," Mr. Marley suggested, smiling at Artie.

"They do. But there is so much they can't tackle," his wife answered. "Mrs. Larue is going to lend me Dora for a day, and we'll manage; anyway, we can easily call the children if we need them—they'll be in the barn."

The next morning Dora, who worked for the Larues, came over to help Mrs. Marley. Miss Simpson, the dressmaker, arrived with her satchel of scissors and pins and patterns. Artie doted on plenty of pins, and he always envied Miss Simpson, but when she heard he was going to a meeting of the Riddle Club, the dressmaker seemed relieved.

"Boys are better off out of the way," she said, tying on her white sewing apron. "You run along and I'll take care of the pins, Artie."

The Riddle Club was fortunate in that it had two places to meet. In the warm weather, the meeting room was a loft in Mr. Larue's barn, a comfortable, pleasant room which they had fitted up, aided by the various mothers' contributions, and enjoyed thoroughly. When it grew too cold to enjoy meeting in an unheated barn, the club moved to a room in the Marley house which Mrs. Marley generously allowed them to have for their own. To be sure, they had only been organized

as a club for one winter, and the room they had used was now nicely fitted up as a guest room; but Polly was sure that before the next cold weather they could have some other good place to hold their meetings.

"The Riddle Club is lucky," said sunny-hearted Polly.

Now it was summer, and it was delightful to climb the loft ladder and march into the club room and be able to see a pleasant landscape from the open window.

"Don't make too much noise," cautioned Fred, as they took their seats. Each member owned a special chair. None of them matched, but that only made the furniture more interesting, as Jess had once explained.

"No, keep quiet," Ward whispered. "Carrie Pepper is out in the yard and she'll make some excuse to come up."

Of course Polly couldn't hope to call the meeting to order till each member had peeped at Carrie Pepper, she who had organized the Conundrum Club, a rival organization. That lively young person was curiously occupied. She sat on a rug in the full glare of the sun, holding something pink on her lap.

"What do you suppose she is doing?" Margy Williamson asked Polly.

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"I don't know," replied Polly. "Will this meeting kindly come to order?"

There was, it developed upon inquiry, no unfinished business to be settled. Fred would have liked to collect dues, but Polly had privately discouraged this thrifty instinct, so he refrained.

"We haven't any money to spare in vacation," Polly had argued. "And of course the members will remember the check for one hundred dollars and think you are only trying to plague them."

"I have a peach of a riddle to ask," said Artie, who was apt to be impatient of parliamentary procedure. "Is it all right to spring it, Polly?"

Polly nodded her consent.

"Why is a man's hand like a hardware store?" asked Artie.

Mr. Marley kept the hardware store in River Bend and Artie, finding this riddle in an old magazine in the attic, had been struck by its obvious appropriateness. As a matter of fact he had run all the way to the store to tell his father, because it seemed to him that a hardware dealer should know when riddles were written about him.

"I never can think," said Margy.

She usually said that before she did think, and the others were accustomed to hearing her say it and, sometimes, solve the puzzle later.

"Artie!" called Carrie Pepper shrilly. "Artie! Your mother wants you."

"I don't believe it," Artie muttered rebelliously, but he started for the ladder.

"You can be thinking till I come back," he said graciously.

He came back before any one had succeeded in solving the riddle.

"Mother wanted to know where I'd put the hammer and nails," he explained.

Fred gave a shout and Artie gasped. He saw his mistake too late.

"Nails!" Fred cried loudly. "Nails, Artie! Isn't that the answer to your riddle?"

"Oh-ho, and you told us!" chuckled Jess. "But it is a good riddle, Artie. Fine!"

"I don't see what Carrie can be doing," Margy murmured.

She could see the Pepper yard from her chair, and her mind wandered from the business before the club.

Ward, however, came out of a brown study and objected that he couldn't see why "nails" should be the answer to the riddle.

"Well, I didn't exactly see it myself," Polly confessed.

"A man's hand is like a hardware store because it carries nails," said Artie.

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Then Fred and Jess and Artie compared notes and found they had heard or read "pieces" of the riddle before and that was the reason they knew the answer was "nails."

"I think you ought to say everything right out," protested Ward.

"After this we will. No riddle answer counts unless it is full and—and explicit," Polly declared, a little proud of her use of that word. "Remember."

"Polly!" they heard Carrie Pepper again. "Pol-ly! your mother wants you. She says to come right away."

CHAPTER III

CARRIE GROWS CURIOUS

IT was now Polly's turn to disappear down the ladder. She was gone so long that Fred decided to ask a riddle.

"Why are twice ten and twice eleven alike?" he demanded sternly.

His sister Margy groaned.

"I don't think it's fair to have arithmetic riddles in vacation," she pouted. "You know I never can guess 'em."

"Well, you can't do arithmetic in the winter either, so what difference does that make?" the heartless Fred propounded. "Come on, folks, do a little thinking."

"Twice ten and twice eleven!" murmured Jess. "They're not one bit alike that I can see."

"There—I guess you thought I was never coming back!" Polly cried, flitting in at the door and up the ladder and sinking breathlessly into her chair. "I had to look over some stuff. Mother and Dora are getting the house ready to close,

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and Mother didn't know whether I wanted some boxes saved or not."

"How long are they going to stay?" asked Fred, forgetting his riddle for the moment. "The house has been open only a couple of days."

"Well, you always have to do a lot of things when you go away," Polly informed him. "Mother seems to think they'll be gone several weeks."

"I guess Carrie knows we're up here all right," giggled Margy. "She keeps looking up at the window."

"Is she still holding that pink stuff?" Polly asked, trying to peer over her friend's shoulder.

"For goodness' sake, is this a Riddle Club meeting or a gab-fest?" the outraged Fred demanded. "I'm waiting for an answer to the riddle I asked, and all you girls can think of is what the neighbors are doing."

Polly laughed good-naturedly.

"What is the riddle?" she said. "I must have missed it."

Fred repeated it, and Polly frowned as she tried hard to think of a probable answer.

"I think twice ten and twice eleven are alike because they are both two figures," ventured Ward.

"Jess! Jess Larue!" Carrie Pepper trilled, her

voice rising to a very high note. "Jess, are you up in the barn?"

"She knows you are," sighed Margy. "Put your head out and see what she wants you for."

Obediently, Jess put her head out of the window and looked down at Carrie.

"What do you want?" she called.

"Your mother wants you to go uptown to the store," said Carrie.

"We might as well go down and stay down," Polly suggested. "We can't have any kind of a meeting and be interrupted every minute. Let's all go to the store with Jess."

"But the riddle!" clamored Artie and Ward in chorus. "Tell us the answer to the riddle before we go."

Fred had to think a moment to recall the answer.

"Twice ten is twenty and twice eleven is twenty-two," he told them.

Margy couldn't see it at all and her brother had to take pencil and paper and illustrate the figures, before she could understand. Even then he had to spell "two" and "too" for her, to make sure.

"Jess!" came Carrie Pepper's voice again. "Jess, your mother wants you to come right away."

The Riddle Club went downstairs and Jess ran

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into the house to find out what her mother wanted.

"I suppose you're holding a meeting of the Riddle Club," said Carrie, looking up at the hedge, over which she could see the other club members gazing solemnly back at her.

"We were," Polly answered. "But we've adjourned."

"Is the Conundrum Club doing anything these days?" questioned Fred.

"No; it's too hot to hold any meetings," answered Carrie. "Besides, most of the members are out of town."

"What *are* you doing, Carrie?" asked Margy, curiosity proving too much for her.

"Oh, I'm fading a ribbon to go on my hat," Carrie replied, holding up the length of pink stuff for them to see. "That's the way to get a perfectly beautiful shade—hold it in the sun. That's the way milliners do," added Carrie importantly.

"Huh, I should think you could hang it on the clothesline," said the downright Margy. "You'll fade your brains in that hot sun."

"I never thought of that," Carrie responded, but whether she meant the convenience of the clothesline or the danger to her brains, she did not explain.

Jess dashed out to announce that her mother

wanted her to go uptown and get the smelling salts bottle refilled at the drug store.

"She's afraid she may be seasick," reported Jess, as the entire membership of the Riddle Club fell into line.

"How can you be seasick on a train?" Artie turned around to ask.

At the same time, behind the hedge Carrie Pepper was saying to herself:

"Who is going to be seasick? I wonder if they are going away again?"

"Why, you don't go on the train to Nova Scotia—you go on a steamer," said Polly to Artie.

"From New York," Fred added.

"You mean they go as far as New York on the train and then the rest of the way by boat?" asked Ward. "That isn't so much! We've been on steamers heaps of times."

So they had, for River Bend was on a river, as its name indicated, and the father of Jess and Ward owned a line of steamboats that daily plied its quiet waters.

"It's more exciting going to Nova Scotia than it is to Lake Bassing, though," Fred said. "You go up the coast and you're on the ocean, not on a river. I wouldn't mind going."

"Well, we can have a good time here," asserted Polly contentedly. "Here is the drug store."

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When they came back from the drug store, more errands were waiting. In fact, the air of bustle and activity that fairly seemed to sweep in a mild gale around the Larue and the Marley houses and to touch the Williamson house, too, puzzled Carrie Pepper mightily. She was used to seeing the six children run back and forth, but this, as she told her mother, was "different."

"And I never did hear why they came back from the Beach so suddenly," said Carrie, meeting one of her school chums on the street that afternoon.

"You came back yourself," said the friend calmly.

"Oh, my father and mother came after me," Carrie answered. "My great-aunt Beulah is coming next week, and of course she'll want to see me. She hasn't seen me since I was four years old."

But Carrie was sure that no great-aunt Beulah was coming to see the Marley children or the Larues. All her spare time she spent peeping through the hedge or hanging over the picket fence that marked the side line of the Larue and Pepper yards. It did seem to Carrie that she would go frantic if she couldn't find out what was going on.

Then, when she saw Polly Marley carrying her dresses over her arm and Jess Larue, with her best

white shoes in her hand, march into the Williamson house, one way of learning what her neighbors were up to occurred to Carrie.

"Hello, Artie," she said engagingly, as that small boy strolled past the hedge, bent on some errand that took him to the Larue barn. "Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes, I am," Artie returned. "I have to empty all the waste-baskets. Mr. Larue says the trash man is coming to-morrow."

"Are you going anywhere?" asked Carrie. "Seems to me you're all working pretty hard in vacation."

Artie had never learned to end a conversation. As long as any one talked to him, he was perfectly helpless. If Carrie Pepper should talk to him till supper time, unless he was rescued by some stronger-minded person, he would remain there, answering her questions.

"I'm not going anywhere," he explained now, putting the waste-basket down on the grass. "Mother and Daddy are, and Mr. and Mrs. Larue."

"But gracious me, they won't go off and leave you, will they?" Carrie cried, lifting her hands above the hedge to indicate her astonishment.

Artie sighed and shifted his weight to the other foot.

"We're going to stay with the Williamsons," he said.

Carrie beamed joyfully. At last she was solving the mystery.

"All of you?" she demanded. "You and Polly and Jess and Ward?"

"Yes," nodded Artie. "All of us. Mrs. Williamson said so."

Carrie plied him with questions. When were they going? "They" of course meaning the older folk. How long were they going to stay? How far away were they going?

"Nova Scotia!" she gasped, when Artie told her this. "Gracious me, isn't that almost as far as Alaska?"

Artie thought not, but before Carrie could ask him anything more, Mr. Larue appeared in the door of the barn and shouted for the basket. Artie gratefully escaped and Carrie was left to her own reflections.

"It's kind of sudden," she mused. "And it almost seems as though there was something queer about it. I notice Artie didn't say *why* they were going."

If Artie had failed to mention this slight circumstance, it was only because Carrie had not thought to ask him. Nevertheless, the more Carrie Pepper pondered, the more convinced was she

that this trip to be undertaken by the Marleys and the Larues was not like other journeys.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Carrie to Edith Spencer, when she met her at the soda fountain later in the day. "Of course I'm not saying this is so—I just think so. It must be family troubles."

"Family troubles?" repeated Edith uncertainly.

"You know—like your son being expelled from college. Old Mr. Rice's son was and he didn't like it talked about," Carrie said. "And once I heard about a girl whose uncle was sent to prison and her father went right off and paid his fine. If there is a prison in Nova Scotia, that might be why they're going."

Edith seemed unconvinced, but Carrie was sure she had discovered the reason for this trip of the Marleys and the Larues. It was something they didn't wish to tell, she argued, for Artie had never mentioned the reason for their going.

"Though you'd think one of the girls would tell me, when I live right next door," thought Carrie resentfully. "I wouldn't tell a single soul."

CHAPTER IV

MOVING NEXT DOOR

MR. WILLIAMSON drove the travelers to the Junction, where the express for New York would stop and pick them up. Margy and Fred urged that there would be room in the car for Polly and Artie and Jess and Ward, but the fathers and mothers vetoed the plan of having the children ride with them as far as the station.

"It's better to say good-by quietly at home," said Mrs. Marley, her arm around Polly. "Now, chicks, be sure you send messages regularly and don't make Mrs. Williamson any trouble. We'll have a great deal to tell you when we come home."

"And we'll bring you some Nova Scotia riddles," Mr. Marley promised.

The Marley house was closed, and so was the Larue place, though Mr. Larue had filled Ward's heart with pride by giving him all the keys to the barn.

"You may do exactly as you please in the barn," he told the assembled Riddle Club. "But running

in and out of the house isn't necessary, and you're apt to be careless and forget to lock up. So, for the time being, you live with Mr. Williamson. I hope he can stand it."

"Always wanted a house running over," said Mr. Williamson contentedly.

Dora, the girl who helped Mrs. Larue, was to stay with Mrs. Williamson and help her, and she stood and waved with the children that morning as the automobile went down the road with the two fathers and mothers waving back as cheerfully as they could to the little group left on the lawn.

"We're going for a drive as soon as the car comes back," Mrs. Williamson announced. "Are you sure you children are going to be comfortable the way we have the rooms arranged?"

They went into the house to look at the rooms again and this, as Mrs. Williamson had foreseen, helped that little "gone feeling" that comes when one's mother and father disappear and one knows it will be several weeks before they come home again.

The Williamson house was not large, and there were only four bedrooms. Fred and Margy had always had their own rooms, Fred's being on the third floor, and Mr. and Mrs. Williamson occupied another. This left one for the guest room.

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Now the three girls had been moved into this guest room. Dora was to have Margy's room, for she was afraid to stay alone in the Larue house, and Fred and the two boy guests were to room together, using the tiny sleeping porch that opened off Fred's room.

Of course, each boy wanted to sleep on the porch, which was nicely screened, and this problem had been settled by decreeing that they should take turns. Artie was to have the first two nights on the cot, then Ward, and Fred would follow him.

"I'm sorry you're so packed in," said Mrs. Williamson, as they came downstairs, to be ready to go on the drive when Mr. Williamson should come back with the car, "especially as the weather stays so warm. But the nights ought to be getting cooler soon."

"It's fun to be together," Polly assured her hostess. "Mother told us we mustn't talk late nights, but we can talk a little, can't we?"

"I can't hope that three girls will drop off to sleep without a word," smiled Mrs. Williamson. "But of course you mustn't lie awake and chatter. Here is the car—are you all ready?"

Mr. Williamson reported that the travelers had "made" the express with time to spare and that their steamer would sail from New York at eight o'clock the next morning.

"We found that out at the station," said Mr. Williamson, carefully backing the car out of the drive. "All the River Bend agent could tell us was that the train made boat connections, but that isn't definite enough to make a fellow feel safe. Now we can imagine them steaming off at eight to-morrow, just as we're finishing the last of the muffins. And now for that ride. Come on, everybody!"

The mounting sun gained in brilliance and warmth, and when the Riddle Club found that their destination was to be a comfortable old inn some ten miles from River Bend, they were glad to look forward to the shady coolness of its wide yard where the dinner tables were always set.

"I felt just like treating the Riddle Club," Mr. Williamson declared, as they drove in under the two great elms that guarded the front gate.

It was a country hotel, famous for its chicken dinners and its wonderful well of ice-cold water. As soon as the car was parked, Mrs. Williamson seated herself on the shady porch to wait while Mr. Williamson talked with a business acquaintance who had nearly finished his meal and the children made a bee line for the well sweep.

"Hot day, all right," said an old man, dozing in the shadow of a maple tree near by.

"It's awful hot," Artie informed him.

"Going to have a big storm," said the old man, lazily watching Fred as he lowered the well bucket.

"Why, there isn't a cloud in the sky!" Margy protested. "It's so clear and hot you wouldn't think there could be a storm for weeks."

"Do you think it will be a thunder-storm?" asked Polly.

"No—not a thunder-storm," the old man returned positively. "There's a cup of water ready for you, child—drink it while it's cold. No, we won't have a thunder-storm. We're in for a real session of wind and rain."

Ward stared at him in respectful astonishment.

"I wish you'd show me how to tell," he begged. "I know folks can tell what the weather is going to be, but I never can guess. Maybe it's because I haven't any rheumatism."

Ward was fat and looked the picture of health. It was impossible to fancy him having rheumatism and equally impossible to be sorry for him because he was without that affliction.

"You'd better not be wishing for aches and pains," chuckled the old man. "Time enough for that—time aplenty. Anyway, I tell the weather by a kind of sense—yes, sir, winter and summer, old Jeb can tell you what the elements are going to do."

"What are they going to do?" Margy half whispered.

The old man closed his eyes and his audience waited respectfully.

"The ele-ments——" said Jeb, opening his eyes so suddenly that Ward, who was peacefully staring at him, jumped. "The ele-ments are a-going to raise Hail Columbia. Yes, sir, you take my word for it! We're going to have the worst storm we've had this summer."

"Wh-en?" Jess stammered.

"Well, now, I can't give you the exact date," said the old man kindly. "The weather sets its own time. All I know is that a storm is coming."

The dinner Mr. Williamson had ordered was brought out to the table under one of the trees now and the children hurried away to enjoy the delicious fried chicken and waffles. In a few moments they had forgotten the old man near the well, and long before they had finished dinner and gone he was sound asleep in his chair.

It seemed strange to Polly and Artie and to Jess and Ward too, when they drove back, to go into Margy Williamson's house instead of hurrying into their own homes to tell their mothers where they had been. The Marley house and the Larue house were dark, and that didn't look natural, either. There were always lights twinkling in

the windows when the lights in the Williamson house were turned on.

After supper the members of the Riddle Club played dominoes to please Artie, who had a perfect passion for that game and who would cheerfully have kept them at it till he dropped asleep under the excitement of losing every game. But Mrs. Williamson announced that she had promised to see that customary bedtime hours were kept and she shooed the players upstairs while Artie was still awake enough to find his way.

It took them all longer than usual to settle down, because it was rather thrilling, so Margy said, to have three in a room. The boys, once Artie was installed on the sleeping porch, took the thrills more matter-of-factly and went to sleep after a few tussles with the pillows and a moment or so of desultory conversation. But the girls found it difficult to stop chattering and Mrs. Williamson, when she came up to bed at ten o'clock, found them still whispering and giggling.

"Margy Williamson, put out that light this minute!" called Margy's mother, pretending to be very severe. "I should think it would be warm enough in there without a light on a night like this. Go to sleep at once, all of you."

"Yes'm," three meek voices answered, and the light went out.

"Polly, I just want to say one thing more," whispered Margy, as Polly, who slept with her, resolutely closed her eyes.

Jess, on a cot across the room, raised up on her elbow to listen.

"Why don't we have a session of the Riddle Club to-morrow afternoon?" said Margy. "You couldn't call that last meeting a real meeting—we were interrupted a hundred times."

"Your teacher would say you exaggerate," Polly reproved her chum. "But I'm willing to have a meeting, if the others are. Why don't we meet in the morning, though?"

"We're going up the river on the first boat and back," said Margy. "Mother thought it would cool us off, and it's lovely in the morning before the decks get hot from the sun."

Polly dropped comfortably off to sleep and Margy smiled to herself in the darkness. She had been taken into her mother's confidence, and Mrs. Williamson, after explaining about the boat trip, had suggested the session of the Riddle Club.

"The first few days will be rather hard for Polly and the others," said Mrs. Williamson. "They'll miss their parents and perhaps be homesick for their own houses and their own rooms. You and Fred must do all you can to make things happy for them and keep them busy and amused."

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The first boat left the River Bend wharf at seven o'clock in the morning. It was no hardship to get up at six that warm summer morning and put on clean frocks and blouses and eat the breakfast Dora had ready for them when they came downstairs. It had been a hot, close night, but with the dawn had come a light breeze, and as the six children stepped on board the boat a deliciously clean fresh wind seemed to spring up.

They had taken the trip before, but it was always new; and as they all knew the captains and the crew of each of the four steamers owned by Mr. Larue, they did not lack friends to talk to even though passengers on the early boat were "few and far between."

They were back by noon, and as soon as they had eaten lunch the six boys and girls went out to the barn to hold the club meeting in their own club room. Ward had a key ring with eight keys on it, and he unlocked the barn door with a flourish, after he had tried five of the keys and found they were not the right ones.

"Isn't it clouding up?" asked Jess, as they stood waiting for Ward and Fred to roll back the sliding doors.

"No; but it is getting cooler, thank goodness," Polly replied absently. "Ward, what *are* all those keys for?"

"Different things," said Ward, not caring to explain that he had found most of them in an old box of odds and ends stored in the attic. "Wait a minute and I'll unlock the other door."

Ward never failed to lock the door of the loft room securely, and he saw nothing funny in the fact that the window was often left wide open. Sometimes the club members thought to remove the little wedge of wood that held open the old-fashioned frame with its small panes of glass, but more frequently they left without touching it. But Ward always locked the door carefully.

Now, as he fumbled at the padlock while the others stood behind him, they could feel a strong draft coming through the cracks in the wall.

"I guess we left the window open," said Artie and just then Ward flung back the door.

Bang! A loud crash startled them and the tinkling sound of falling glass quickly followed.

CHAPTER V

TOBY'S SON

"WHAT in the world!" cried Margy.

All tried to crowd into the room at once and became wedged in the doorway. Artie, thinking quickly, dropped to his knees and crawled over the doorsill, and in another moment the others had eased through.

"It's the window!" Fred declared. "Look!"

The window had crashed down and many of the small panes were shattered, the glass lying in bits on the floor and rug.

"I *told* you it was getting cloudy," said Jess triumphantly. "Just see—we're going to have an awful storm."

She pointed toward the tips of the trees, just visible through the window. The branches were thrashing and swaying in a strong wind, and now, as the children closed the door of the club room, the noise of the wind shrieking and whistling through the barn was plainly heard.

"It may be nothing but a wind storm," said Polly. "It hasn't rained a drop yet and I haven't

heard thunder, have you? Let's go ahead with the meeting."

"It's pretty dark," Margy objected. "I wish we had a lamp."

"Dad wouldn't like it," said Ward hastily.

"We'll clear away this glass and then it will be lighter—I don't believe this is much of a storm," Fred announced. "Come on, Artie. Don't cut yourself! Here's the wooden wedge half way across the room—it must have blown a gale, to knock the window down like that."

Fred and Artie and Ward managed to clean up the splintered glass, and then, though the clouds were still thick and the loft room rather shadowy, they decided to go on with their meeting.

"For pity's sake, some one think of a cheerful riddle," begged Margy, who was sensitive to storms and always dreaded them.

"All right, Margy; here is a sunny one," said her brother good-humoredly. "Of what trade is the sun?"

"Say, I just thought of something," Margy answered irrelevantly. "Do you remember that old man we saw yesterday? Out at the hotel? He said we were going to have a storm, and I'll bet this is it."

They all remembered the old man who had talked about the "ele-ments."

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"Well, I'd like to be able to tell the weather ahead," said Artie enviously. "I could have a lot of fun with the fellows in school."

"You mean they'd have a lot of fun with you when your guesses didn't work out right," grunted Ward. "Who's going to answer the riddle?"

Polly rapped on the table three times with her gavel.

"This club will please come to order," she said severely. "We're getting into very bad habits lately. We don't pay any attention to the main business at all. Margy, can you answer Fred's riddle?"

Margy couldn't and reluctantly said so.

"I don't think the sun has any trade," the perverse Artie stated. "Unless—unless—Is it a baker?"

"Well, young man, you're nearer right than you think," Fred encouraged him. "That doesn't happen to be the answer, but it's something like that."

Artie began in a sing-song voice, "Butcher, baker, candle-stick maker," until Ward kindly smothered him with the old pillow the fat boy kept in his chair. Ward thought a great deal about being comfortable, and he was the only member of the Riddle Club who had demanded a cushion to sit on.

"Perhaps the sun is a farmer," guessed Polly. "Makes the crops grow, you know."

"Too far-fetched," Fred informed her. "Come on, Jess, you haven't uttered a peep."

"I can't think of any trades," explained Jess, "except shoemakers and carpenters and things like that."

"If you all give up, I'll tell you," said Fred, secretly hoping that they would give up.

"Fire away," Artie directed, feeling that as it was his sister who was president of the club, he was empowered with all her authority.

"The sun is a tanner, of course," stated Fred.

Every one said "oh!" a little blankly. Riddle answers are so absurdly easy when you are told them, and so hard to guess!

"Now let me give out one," begged Margy, eager to redeem her failure. "Wait a minute till I get it straight in my mind——"

"Oh, Margy, don't ask one of those complicated ones," Jess pleaded. "It's too hot."

"I think we ought to keep in practice," declared Margy. "For all you know, the Conundrum Club is learning new riddles every day; then they'll come back in the fall and skin us alive."

"I don't call that a very elegant expression," Jess criticized her.

"Carrie Pepper says it," grinned Margy.

"The club will please come to order," Polly advised them, smiling as she banged the gavel sharply.

"I've thought of it!" said Margy quickly. "Listen, if Dan's father is Toby's son, what relation is Dan to Toby?"

"I know that one," Polly announced.

"Don't tell them," warned Margy. "It took me ever so long to get it worked out, even with the answer printed next to it. Let 'em guess it, Polly."

Polly was willing, and already Ward's lips were moving in desperation.

"What did you say Dan's father's name was?" he inquired suddenly.

"I didn't say—or was it Toby?—no! Now, don't ask a lot of questions and mix me all up," scolded Margy. "Toby's father hasn't any name."

"He ought to have," Artie argued. "You could put one in and it would sound harder. You could say, 'Dan's father Henry is Toby's son and Dan is Henry's son and—and—'"

"That will do for you," said Fred. "You're enough to make any one crazy without trying to solve riddles. If Dan's father is Toby's son—if Dan's father is Toby's son—'"

Ward slipped out of his chair and rolled on the

rug, to relieve his feelings. There was very little space on the rug, and he got too near the edge and ran a splinter into his hand from the floor, which had the effect of concentrating his attention on that.

"Toby's son is Dan's father," said Artie brightly.

"Did I say that?" Margy demanded, beginning to feel bewildered. "I don't think that is the way I said it."

Polly laughed and Jess asked her to tell them the answer.

"Don't give up so easily," said Polly. "Take turns—it is confusing the way you fling back answers with no system. We used to have better meetings than we do now."

"Well, it's hot," complained Jess. "I wish I was on the steamer going to Nova Scotia."

"You guess this riddle," Margy commanded, anxious to keep thought and conversation away from the absent mothers and fathers.

"I think Toby was a thief," said Jess impishly. "Toby came to my house and stole a plate of beef."

"We have a Toby jug that belonged to my great-grandmother," Artie contributed helpfully.

Polly laughed and Fred and Margy laughed with her.

"I don't know what kind of words you have," said Margy. "Fred, you try. If Dan's father is Toby's son, what relation is Dan to Toby?"

"First cousin," Fred hazarded.

"You're guessing," accused Margy. "I suppose I might as well tell you—Toby is Dan's grandfather."

"He *is*!" chorused four indignant voices. "How do you make that out?"

"I didn't—I don't," Margy assured them, instantly pained-stricken. "I read it. The little book says that is the way it is."

"Well, let's figure it out," said Fred, who liked to prove things. "Dan's father is Toby's son—well say Artie is Mr. Marley's son—"

"But I'm not my grandfather," Artie objected.

"Oh, do keep still," Ward admonished him. "I can see it when you all stop talking. Dan's father is Toby's son and that makes Toby Dan's grandfather."

"Go to the head of the class," said Fred grimly. "The riddle told you that much. Here, give me a piece of paper. I mean to work this out."

When Fred had drawn a number of dots and crosses and a diagram or two, he announced that he "had it."

"We can take Carrie Pepper's grandfather for an—ah—illustration," said Fred. "He is named

Henry, you know, and her father is John. Well, suppose we say, 'If Carrie's father is Henry's son, what relation is Henry to Carrie Pepper?' There—do you see now?"

Slowly comprehension dawned on the worried faces.

"Yes, I see it all right," admitted Artie. "But you said Carrie's father is named John and you don't use John in the riddle."

"Well, I like to have something in reserve," Fred explained, and as Artie didn't understand that, either, he thought it must be a good explanation, and he subsided.

"Listen to the window rattle!" observed Margy. "And, yes, it is beginning to rain! That old man was right—he said we'd have wind and rain."

The casement was rattling sharply in the wind and a sudden gust blew the rain through the broken panes.

"I think we'd better go to the house," said Polly decidedly. "Let's pull the rug back from the window in case it rains in more—the wind seems to be in this direction. It will probably storm for a couple of days, now it has started."

The boys and girls pulled back the rug and weighted down the few papers on the table, and when everything was safely protected from any

rain that might beat in, they locked the door and descended the ladder.

It was fun to dash across the already soaked grass and land, a laughing, breathless group, on the porch of the Williamson house. It had grown colder since they entered the barn, and a driving wind and rain was lashing the flowers and shrubbery mercilessly.

"Goodness, I didn't know it was raining like this!" said Polly to Margy, as they went upstairs together. "I wonder if it is raining in New York?"

"I don't believe so," Margy returned. "I don't think different parts of the country have the same kind of weather at the same time, do you?"

Polly didn't know, but all the evening she was rather quiet, and when the windows rattled, she glanced at them a little worriedly. Mrs. Williamson found her standing at the door that evening when she went to put the milk bottles out.

"I was just wondering about—Mother," said Polly. "Margy said she didn't believe it was raining in New York to-night. Of course the folks are not in New York now—they're on the steamer and out on the ocean. I wonder if this same storm is there, too."

"We'll hope not," Mrs. Williamson replied cheerfully. "Even if it should be stormy, the

boats are large and seaworthy and there is nothing to worry about. Just go to sleep and rest, Polly, and in the morning you'll find the sun shining and you can begin to count the days until we may expect a message from Nova Scotia."

Polly went to bed obediently, but she did not go to sleep at once. Long after Jess and Margy slumbered peacefully, Polly lay awake, listening to the storm. She woke first in the morning, too, and, slipping on her dressing gown, she ran downstairs to get the newspaper which she knew was always left on the porch, anchored by the door mat.

CHAPTER VI

THE LONG NIGHT

“POLLY! Polly! What are you doing?” some one whispered behind her as she closed the door.

It was Jess, sitting on the lowest step of the stairs and shivering as the wind struck her.

“I came down to get the paper,” said Polly. “I—I wanted to read the weather report.”

“Oh!” Jess murmured. “Well, what does it say?”

Polly was peering through the curtains on the door at the rain-soaked street. The sun was not shining, as Mrs. Williamson had predicted it would be, but at least the rain had stopped.

“What does the weather report say?” urged Jess, drawing the folds of her pink gown more closely around her.

“It says, ‘Forecast for to-day, rain, with north-east winds increasing to gales. Clearing and warmer to-morrow,’ ” read Polly.

“Iuh, lots of times they don’t get it right,” Jess said, trying to speak cheerfully.



IT WAS FUN TO DASH ACROSS THE SOAKED GRASS.

The Riddle Club at Shadybrook.

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Polly put the paper on the hall table where Mr. Williamson would be able to find it and went upstairs with Jess, where they found Margy awake and intensely curious as to the cause of their absence.

"Is it raining?" she demanded. "Where have you been? Say, it's a lot colder than yesterday. Funny weather for the first week in September."

The weather was the main topic of conversation at the table that morning. The children argued that as long as it had stopped raining, the sun would likely be out, but Mr. Williamson said that he felt "in his bones" they would have a "northeastern."

"But it's only the beginning of September," urged Artie.

"Stranger things than that have happened," was Mr. Williamson's reply. "My advice to you, if you're going out, is to carry an umbrella."

Half an hour later the rain was pouring in a slanting silver sheet that left no one in doubt as to the kind of day it would be.

It was an excellent chance to hold a meeting of the Riddle Club, around the fire in the fireplace. Though the day before had been so warm that the children had sighed for Sunrise Beach, the rain brought with it a cold dampness that made a wood fire a delight. Polly was just about to make the

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suggestion of the club meeting when Carrie Pepper arrived to spend the day.

"It's such an awful day," said Carrie, coming up the Williamson porch steps, her face damp and rosy from the brief walk in the wind and rain, "that I said to Mother that I knew Polly and Jess would be having the blues. So I came over to spend the day and kind of cheer you up."

Mrs. Williamson was the only one with presence of mind enough to make the visitor welcome. The members of the Riddle Club seemed stupefied, and as Carrie took off her hat and raincoat, talking volubly all the time, the six chums stood dumbly in the background and stared at her.

Margy was the first to recover.

"I suppose we might as well go in and sit down," she said in a curiously flat little voice.

It continued to pour all day and Carrie stayed all day. She was not a difficult guest to entertain, but it cannot be truthfully said that her friends enjoyed themselves as much as she did. Carrie dearly loved to talk, and she was not interested in the rainy-day games like hide-and-seek and Mad March Hare which especially pleased Artie and Ward. Carrie liked to sit by the fire and embroider and, as she expressed it, "converse." She usually conversed about her acquaintances, and Polly, who avoided gossip as much as possible,

found it rather difficult to steer the talk into broader channels. The boys were frankly bored and disappeared after luncheon, going to the Larue barn where they relieved their nerves by practicing acrobatic stunts in the haymow.

Carrie stayed till nearly five o'clock, and by that time the wind had risen to such velocity that it was shrieking down the chimneys with all the fury of a December gale.

"Better let me hold the umbrella for you, Carrie," said Mr. Williamson, coming in as Carrie was putting on her coat. "You'll be blown into the river before you know it, if you're not careful."

Carrie laughed, but when she stood on the porch and opened her umbrella, it was torn out of her hands and sent scudding across the lawn into the hedge.

Fred ran after the umbrella, and he and Mr. Williamson went the short distance to her home with Carrie. Less than half a block, she was breathless when deposited safely on her own side porch.

"It's—some—wind!" shouted Fred to his father, as they plowed their way back in the face of the gale.

Mr. Williamson nodded, and they dashed for the door as Ward and Artie held it open. The

moment they let go, it slammed shut with a crash that shook the house.

"It's worse than it was yesterday," said Artie, gazing at the streams of water cascading from Fred's raincoat.

"Yesterday was nothing," Fred assured him. "This is the worst storm I ever saw."

Polly waylaid him after supper as he was going down the cellar after more wood.

"Fred," said Polly, "do you think this storm is on the coast?"

Fred looked puzzled for a moment. Then he understood.

"You're worrying about the Nova Scotia steamer," he said quickly. "I wouldn't, if I were you, Polly. Suppose it does storm—look at the ships that go across the ocean. A storm on the water doesn't mean a thing. In fact, lots of times it is safer than on land—I've heard Dad say so. The wind spends its force more quickly and some of the captains don't pay any attention to storms at all."

This last statement was more comforting than accurate, but Polly was quite willing to be soothed. Her vivid imagination persisted in picturing the steamer on which her father and mother and Jess and Ward's father and mother were, rolling help-

lessly in the wind. She had stolen down to get the paper that morning to see if it carried any news of shipwrecks, and had been relieved to find that no mention was made of a storm on the coast.

The Williamson family went to bed early that night, but the banging of shutters and the rattle of window casements seemed to increase as the night wore on. Artie manifestly could not sleep on the third floor porch, and his cot was moved into Fred's room, where he did not add to the peace of mind of the other two boys by insisting on recounting to them all the stories he could remember having read about storms.

"If you'd only keep still we might be able to go to sleep," Fred suggested at last.

Somewhere in the house a loud crash sounded, and Artie leaped from his bed.

"Did you hear that?" he demanded, somewhat unnecessarily.

"Not being deaf, we did," Fred replied, dashing for the door. "It sounded down in the cellar."

The noise had aroused the entire household, and every one streamed out into the hall, crying:

"What is it? Did you hear that crash? Where was it?"

"You kids go back to bed," commanded Mr.

Williamson, who was on his way downstairs with a flashlight. "It's probably a shutter that came loose and fell down."

"The girls can stay up where they belong, but we're coming with you, Dad," Fred announced, and he and Ward and Artie joyously hurtled down the stairs, Artie audibly hoping they were going to meet a burglar.

"Gee, I feel a wind!" announced Ward, as they filed into the pantry.

"There's your burglar," Mr. Williamson informed them, pointing to the shattered glass on the pantry floor. "Stand back, don't get into this mess—the whole window is smashed."

"What—what did it?" asked Artie, trying not to let his teeth chatter.

"Must have been a limb of the maple tree," Mr. Williamson returned. "Yes, that was probably it. I'm sorry now I didn't trim that tree last spring. Well, there's nothing to do but leave it as it is till morning. We can't clean up the glass to-night, and the rain won't hurt anything in here."

They went back and told the "women-folks," as Artie grandly designated the waiting feminine members of the household, what had happened.

"It is a dreadful night, but we must try to get some sleep," said Mrs. Williamson. "Cover up

warmly, all of you, and try to count sheep—then you'll drop off to sleep and the 'ele-ments' won't disturb you."

They all smiled at the recollection of the old weather prophet who had so persistently predicted a great storm.

"There was something to what he said, after all," Margy pointed out, snuggling down under the blankets.

The girls were just dozing off when a tremendous thud aroused them. The noise seemed to be outside the house this time.

"I heard chickens!" cried Jess excitedly.

"You must be crazy," Margy protested. "How could you hear chickens at this time of night?"

"I think I did, too," interposed Polly. "Girls, do you know what I think has happened? A tree has blown down and landed on the Peppers' chicken house. Listen—can't you hear the hens squawking?"

Jess ran to the window and tried to see out.

"Pitch dark," she reported. "If the tree fell on the chicken house, it just has to stay there, that's all. Oh, dear, I never saw such an upset night!"

Poor Jess looked so forlorn that Polly made her get into bed with her, and soon, in spite of the howling of the wind and the blinds that would

persist in banging, the three girls went wearily to sleep.

They all slept later than usual the next morning. Polly was the first to waken. The clock on the table by the bed told her it was a quarter past eight.

“The paper!” she thought instantly, and slipping out of bed, opened the door noiselessly, and started down the stairs.

As she passed the hall window she noticed that it had stopped raining and that a watery sun was struggling through the streaked clouds.

“Why, Artie!” said Polly, in surprise, as she saw her brother in his favorite reading position, flat on the floor of the main hall. “Artie, what are you doing?”

For reply, Artie held up the morning paper to show the big black headlines that streamed across the first page.

“‘Storm on Atlantic Coast Worst in Years—Seven Ships Reported Missing,’ ” read Polly aloud. “Oh, Artie!”

CHAPTER VII

'AFTER THE STORM

ARTIE had a boy's awkwardness when it came to expressing sympathy, but he patted Polly on the shoulder and said he guessed it wasn't so bad.

"Ships have radio sets and they can't get lost nowadays," Artie attempted to console his sister.

"It says seven ships are missing," insisted Polly. "Let me have the paper. I want to read what it says."

"Read it aloud," Artie begged. "You read faster than I can."

He and Polly sat down together on the lowest step of the hall stairs and Polly began to read the news of the storm. Great gales had swept the Atlantic coast from Florida to Maine and much damage had been done to coastwise shipping.

"There was a wreck!" cried Polly, coming upon this item in the newspaper account. "Ships do get lost and they do get wrecked! Here's a ship was wrecked near Block Island. You see you don't have to be out in the middle of the ocean at all."

Before she had finished the story of the wreck

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and the havoc wreaked by the storm, Mrs. Williamson and Dora came downstairs and shooed Polly and Artie back to their rooms.

"Newspapers exaggerate, dear," said Mrs. Williamson, when her eyes saw the headlines. "Now don't worry, because we'll hear from the *Washington* soon."

"We won't tell Jess and Ward," Polly said to Artie, as they hurried upstairs to dress. "There is no use in making them anxious, because we don't know for sure that anything has happened to that steamer."

However, by breakfast time, every one in the house knew that the terrible storm of the night before had been general and that it had been especially heavy off the coast. It seemed as though those black headlines stood out so clearly that no eye could fail to read them.

"Gee, there was a storm at sea," said Ward, his round face sobered, his voice anxious. "Do you suppose——"

"I wonder where the *Washington* is," Jess murmured. "Do you suppose——"

Mrs. Williamson, flooding Polly's oatmeal with cream and passing the sugar bowl to Ward, who was sure to help himself liberally and in consequence was usually cut off from temptation, smiled reassuringly.

"Now, children, I want you to stop fretting," she said firmly. "We'll admit there was a bad storm at sea and that several vessels are reported missing and at least one is wrecked. But the *Washington* is a splendid passenger ship, not a freighter or a tramp steamer, and is equipped with every known safety device and carries a fine and trustworthy crew. Daddy Williamson is going to try to get a message through to the home offices of the steamship company, and until the answer comes, I want you all to make up your minds that everything is all right."

"Bad news travels fast," Artie announced. "I read that in a book; so if the *Washington* had been wrecked, I think we would have heard of it by now."

"How long will it be before the answer comes?" asked Polly, swiftly thinking of the miles that lay between River Bend and New York.

"I don't think we're likely to hear before night," Mrs. Williamson replied, rescuing the sugar bowl from Ward, who was apparently seeking to drown his worry in granulated sugar.

Mr. Williamson had had an early breakfast and had gone out before the children came downstairs.

"You see, my dears," said Mrs. Williamson now, "it isn't only that New York is far away, but this storm and the accounts of it people all over

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the United States are reading this morning, will naturally make any one with a relative or friend at sea intolerably anxious. All who think of it will telegraph or telephone the steamship lines to hear what news has been received from the ships, and the offices will be swamped with messages. We'll have to be patient and wait for ours in turn."

Polly and the others readily saw that the only sensible thing to do was to keep as busy as possible until they could hope to receive an answer to Mr. Williamson's telegram.

"A tree's blown down!" cried Artie, glancing from the dining room window. "Right smack across Mr. Pepper's chicken house! Gee, you ought to see it!"

"We girls heard the noise in the night," Margy announced, running with the others to the window. "Jess and Polly were sure they heard chickens squawking."

As the young folks had finished breakfast and the sun was now streaming into the dining room, there seemed to be no reason why they should not go out and inspect their neighbor's calamity at close range. They ran pellmell through the kitchen, but when they reached the back porch they stopped short.

"Did you *ever!*!" cried Polly helplessly.

The back lawn was thickly strewn with leaves and twigs and here and there a large branch torn from the shade trees. Part of the hedge was down and all the tall flowers in Mrs. Williamson's garden were beaten flat to the ground. The drive had been washed till one side was a deep gully, and the stones and gravel had been carried across the lawn in a wide swath that at first sight seemed to be a gash cut through the turf.

"It certainly did rain," said Fred. "Let's go round and look at the front of the house."

They found the front lawn sadly littered, too, and Elm Road, as far as the Riddle Club could see, was strewn with limbs and branches and washed in some places till the top dressing was completely gone.

"Come on and see the chicken house," urged Artie. "I'll bet a lot of trees blew down last night," he added, as they started for the Pepper yard.

Mr. and Mrs. Pepper and Carrie were out looking at the chicken house when the six chums reached the hedge. They hastened through the opening and saw that a fine elm had fallen squarely across the frame building, crushing it at either end.

"Did it kill anything?" asked Ward, too excited to think of sparing any sensitive feelings.

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"Kill anything?" Carrie echoed. "I should think it did! Why, two of the loveliest roosters you ever saw were killed outright and a Plymouth Rock hen was so badly hurt Father had to kill her."

"What a shame!" sympathized Polly. "We heard the tree fall in the night. Wasn't it a terrible storm?"

"I wouldn't have cared so much if it had been in October or November," Mrs. Pepper mourned. "I could have cooked the chickens for salad for the Ladies' Aid suppers. Maybe you'd all better come over to-night and have stewed chicken with us."

"Thank you—but they're not good," said Artie, who had a fatal gift of saying exactly what was on his mind.

"Not good!" Mrs. Pepper said.

"Not good?" echoed Carrie.

"Not good? And what's the matter with them?" Mr. Pepper asked, surprised, but even more curious than surprised.

Polly looked apprehensively at Artie. She had a strong desire to take him by the coat sleeve and lead him home before he could say anything more.

"Well, I guess I ought to know," said Artie defensively. "I read it in a book. When a chicken dies, you can't eat it, because it isn't good."

Mrs. Pepper sniffed, while Fred laughed outright.

"I suppose your mother feeds you live chickens?" suggested Mr. Pepper mildly.

"Live chickens? Why, no," Artie replied. "She cooks them."

"Does she cook them alive?" asked Mr. Pepper. "Our folks mostly kill a chicken before they cook it, but I've heard tell there are more ways than one of doing a job."

"Don't be an idiot, Artie," Fred said briskly. "Of course a chicken has to be killed before you eat it. There's nothing the matter with these chickens. They're all right."

"Well, I reckon we can manage to eat our own chicken dinner," said Mrs. Pepper coldly, taking up the dead chickens in her apron and starting for the house. "You needn't bother to come over, after all."

Fred and Ward offered to help lift the tree, but Mr. Pepper said he had a man coming to saw it up and that it was too heavy for boys to handle.

"You'll have enough to do to clear up your own place," said Carrie's father good-naturedly. "That storm certainly mussed up the landscape hereabouts."

"What made you say a thing like that, Artie?"

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Margy demanded, as the members of the Riddle Club went back to the Williamson steps.

"Mrs. Pepper looked as though she could shake you," said Polly, trying not to smile, but not succeeding.

"You're a Hottentot, but you saved us from going out to dinner," Fred contributed. "So I'll say a kind word in your favor."

"I read it in a book," Artie declared stubbornly. "A dead chicken isn't good to eat."

"What a goose you are!" said Jess. "All chickens have to be dead before we eat them. But if they die of disease, then they are not good to eat. A tree falling on a chicken doesn't spoil it."

"Oh!" Artie murmured and turned this over in his mind for several moments.

"Well, anyway, I didn't want to eat chickens a tree fell on," he announced pleasantly.

"No more did we," Fred informed him. "Come on now, we're going to get this place cleaned up before Dad comes home to lunch."

They all worked with a will, and by noon time most of the branches and twigs were piled in the cellar for Dora, who declared that as soon as they were dried out, they would make excellent kindling.

Mr. Williamson telephoned that he would not be home for lunch, because the storm had disar-

ranged the schedule of the river boats and several consignments he expected were delayed. He had had no word from the New York steamship office, but he told Mrs. Williamson that he was confident they would hear something before night.

"Gee, it's getting hot again!" said Ward, mopping his face as the girls and boys started in to tidy the Larue lawn which, like the Marley grounds also, were strewn with débris.

"Exercise is good for you," Jess told him. "Though I must say it doesn't make you thin," she added.

The young people were still piling up torn branches late in the afternoon when they heard the Williamson telephone ring shrilly.

"I'll bet that's it!" shouted Fred, and with one accord they all started for the house, Polly in the lead.

"The screen door's hooked!" she cried, as she tugged at the catch. "Dora! Dora! Open the door quick! The telephone's ringing!"

CHAPTER VIII

ARTIE BRINGS NEWS

THE telephone bell continued to ring persistently, and Polly as persistently pulled at the door.

"Make it open!" she pleaded. "I know that is from the telegraph office."

"It isn't locked—there's a spring," Margy cried, so excited herself that her fingers fumbled. "You press it—there!"

She held her thumb on the spring and Polly jerked the door back. Dora was nowhere to be seen, and they knew Mrs. Williamson had gone to town.

"Want me to answer it, Polly?" asked Fred, very gently for him.

Polly nodded. She had been eager to reach that ringing bell, but now she found that she didn't wish to be the one to take the receiver from the hook.

Fred sat down at the hall table and the others pressed close to him.

"Hello!" he called. "Hello? Yes, Dad—yes, they're right here. Go ahead."

Margy pressed Polly's hand sympathetically as Fred listened intently. They could hear Mr. Williamson's voice through the instrument, but it was impossible to distinguish what he said.

"Yes—all right. Yes," said Fred, as his father's voice paused.

Mr. Williamson added a few more words and then Fred hung up the receiver.

"The answer came!" he told the waiting group, his face so bright that they were assured of good news without the message.

"Dad says he had it sent to the office, because he wanted to see it first," explained Fred. "The steamship company telegraphed that the *Washington* has been heard from and that all on board are safe and well. They had to go out of their course because of the storm, but at no time were the passengers or crew in danger. The ship expects to reach Nova Scotia on schedule time."

"Isn't that great!" Ward shouted, making a dive for Artie and bearing him to the rug with a thump that would have demolished a less sturdy boy.

Diamonds twinkled in Polly's eyes, but she winked them away and smiled at Jess, who dried the tears that had sprung into her eyes.

"Dora, the *Washington* is all right—we've heard!" called Margy, catching sight of Dora as she crossed the hall into the kitchen.

"Praise be!" Dora ejaculated thankfully. "I'm glad I made a chocolate cake for supper."

That caused a hearty laugh, and when Mrs. Williamson came in she was greeted by the sound of the phonograph playing a lively march, while Artie and Ward wrestled among the sofa cushions and the four older children seemed to be seeing which could talk the loudest.

"This is the most cheerful house on the block," declared Mrs. Williamson. "I could hear you a block away."

"Did you hear, Mother?" asked Fred eagerly. "Not us! I mean about—"

"Yes, dear, I stopped in at the store and Dad told me," Mrs. Williamson answered. "We're all as glad as we can be. And next time, remember, no one is to do a bit of worrying."

She blew a kiss to Polly and Jess and went upstairs to put away her hat.

"I won't worry," Polly promised herself resolutely. "Of course, if I had stopped to think, I'd have known that boats are not wrecked every time there is a storm; there wouldn't be many boats left if they sank each time the wind blew."

The relief from the worry and strain of waiting to hear carried the girls and boys hilariously through supper. Then, as it was a "movie night," Mr. Williamson took them all uptown as his special celebration, he said. River Bend did not have motion pictures every night, and when they did come, it was something in the nature of a gala occasion.

"How hot it is!" said Mrs. Williamson, when they came out of the "Picture Palace" to find the stars shining placidly as though no storm had ever raged.

"And school opens next week—worse luck," Fred sighed.

"It's always hot the first week of school," said Artie, and at Ward's sarcastic, "I suppose you read that in a book," the rest hooted.

"Children, children, what will the neighbors think of you?" Mrs. Williamson remonstrated. "It's after ten—do be still. And we slept so wretchedly last night, I wanted you to make up for lost time. Mind you go to sleep at once to-night. Only—Dora told me we are out of butter. I wonder if one of you will go uptown before breakfast to-morrow morning?"

"I will, if I can sleep on the porch to-night," Artie promised.

This was a very adroit move, and Mr. Williamson chuckled appreciatively. It was Ward's turn to have the cot on the sleeping porch, but Ward detested being routed out early in the morning. Rather than go uptown before breakfast, the fat boy would have allowed Artie to sleep forever on the porch.

That matter amicably settled, the house was soon quiet and dark, for as Mrs. Williamson had said, their rest the night before had been sadly broken.

Artie, true to his word, trotted off for the butter the next morning before Ward was awake or Fred dressed. He walked leisurely enough to the grocery store, but he returned at a gallop. His whole appearance as he burst into the room where Fred was struggling with a clean collar and tie was of one bearing astounding news.

"Guess what!" gasped Artie.

"You look like a beet—no, a lobster," Ward informed him. "What did you want to run for?"

"Guess what!" repeated Artie, paying no attention to the critical one.

"All right, all right," Fred said irritably. "Get it out of your system. Did you see something? I'll guess what."

Artie could afford to be patient. He knew something they did not know.

"You know school?" he asked, being noticeably poor in his preliminary attacks.

"I suppose it's burned down," Ward muttered, trying to unknot a shoelace.

"No, it hasn't," said Artie. "But there won't be any school for three weeks more!"

Artie had the orator's reward. Fred stared and Ward's mouth sagged ludicrously.

"No school for three more weeks!" echoed Fred. "What happened?"

"The ceilings fell down," Artie answered. "I heard them talking about it in the grocery store. The ceilings weren't any good, and along comes this heavy rain and soaks through, and last night nearly every ceiling in the whole building came down. Folks who live near the school thought a powder mill had blown up."

"The roof must have leaked," said Fred authoritatively. "Couldn't soak the ceilings unless it got through the roof first."

"Are you sure they all fell down?" Ward inquired anxiously.

That, too, was Jess's first thought when the girls heard the news at the breakfast table.

"Maybe the ceiling in our room didn't fall," she suggested.

"Mr. Kenny said that those that were not already down, were just ready to fall," said

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Artie, who had certainly listened to good purpose.

"But how do you know there won't be any school for three weeks?" Margy asked next.

"Mr. Kenny said it will take that long to get the building in shape," the patient Artie reported. "Anyway, you don't have to believe me—ask anybody."

The Riddle Club took his advice to the extent that, in company with nearly the entire school population of River Bend, they went immediately after breakfast to view the fallen ceilings. The doors were roped off and no one was allowed to enter, but the windows had been opened to allow the dust to escape, and some of the boys scaled the walls and took bird's-eye peeps into the classrooms.

"It's a wreck, all right," said Fred, returning after one of these expeditions. "Broken plaster and dirt and dust are piled on all the desks about four inches thick. In some rooms the ceilings are cracked and bulging and you can see they're just waiting for a little jar to tumble down. You never saw such a mess—just cleaning up will take a week, I should say, and then all the plastering has to be done. And they say the janitors had some of the rooms all scrubbed, ready for the opening of school."

The young folks stayed in the school yard,

hopefully waiting for more ceilings to fall, until the intense heat of the sun drove them to seek a cooler spot.

"I wish we were back at the beach," sighed Margy, as they walked through the town, taking the shady side of the street.

"So do I," Jess said heartily. "Don't you, Polly?"

"It would be nice," admitted Polly. "But I was wondering——"

"What are you wondering, Polly Prim?" Margy demanded affectionately.

Polly's gaze was on the three boys tramping merrily ahead, oblivious of the heat and deep in some weighty argument.

"You mustn't tell, Margy," said Polly, lowering her voice. "But I've been wondering whether we are not too much trouble for your mother."

"Why, Polly Marley, how you talk!" Margy's tone dropped discreetly at a warning glance from Polly. "Why, you know Mother says she loves to have a house filled with young people and Dad is crazy about a crowd. And Mother says we all help her, and even Dora thinks it is nice to have a lot at the table. I don't see how you can talk that way, Polly."

"Well, but——" said Jess, and stopped.

"You've noticed it, too, then," Polly said.

"Margy, I think your father and mother are worried about something, and it must be us."

Margy shook her head stubbornly.

"Maybe it is the store," she conceded. "When Dad sends out a bunch of bills and payment is held up or is slow, he worries. And when he worries Mother worries with him. It may be that, but I just know there's nothing about you or Jess and Artie and Ward to worry my mother. She *likes* to have you live with us."

Polly smiled at Margy's vehemence, but made no comment. And Margy, perhaps to prove that Polly was making a mistake, began to watch her parents more closely. Margy was not normally very observant, or perhaps she was inclined to be wrapped up in her own affairs. But once given a hint, she could and did follow it to the bitter end.

"Fred," she said to her brother the next morning, "do you think Mother and Dad are worried about anything?"

"Mother is," Fred answered promptly. "Maybe it is only the hot weather. I heard her say she wished we could go to the beach again."

"All of us?" said Margy. "That would be fun, wouldn't it? But why should that worry her?"

"I don't know," Fred returned. "Maybe collections are slow or something. Anyway, the

thing for us to do is not to mope and groan about the weather. It doesn't make it any cooler, to say it is the hottest day we ever lived through."

"Polly," said Mr. Williamson a day or two later when she stopped in the store to get some thread Mrs. Williamson wished, "will you tell them up at the house that I'm going to bring home a visitor for lunch? He'll get in on the half-past twelve boat and we'll be right up."

Polly promised to take the message, and with her thread in her bag she was half way up the street before she thought that Mr. Williamson had not said who his visitor was to be.

"I won't go back because Mrs. Williamson probably knows," thought Polly. "Even if she doesn't, I don't want to bother Mr. Williamson. His desk was covered with letters and he looked as though he didn't know I was really there."

"Some one for lunch?" said Mrs. Williamson when Polly told her. "Now, I wonder who in the world it can be." Then she smiled to herself as if she knew something.

CHAPTER IX

MORE SURPRISES

THE visitor proved to be a jolly old farmer who came stamping up the steps with Mr. Williamson an hour later and beamed at the assembled household as though he thought they were the finest folk he had ever met.

"Good house for Santa Claus to settle down in," he chuckled, standing his cane in a corner and putting his hat on it.

He was introduced as Mr. Pepps—Peter Pepps—and before he had been at the table five minutes every one knew that he lived at "Shadybrook" with "Mother" and that "there wasn't a finer farm in seven counties."

"We haven't got a river, but we have a brook," said Mr. Pepps. "And all that brook needs is some kids to go wading in it."

His eyes twinkled at the fascinated Artie, who was forgetting to eat.

"Hot?" said Peter Pepps, in response to a remark from Mrs. Williamson. "Well, yes, it is a

mite warm for this time of year. But I want the grapes to ripen. Jenny is sending you down a box of apples, ma'am—leastways, she will when the weather gets cooler. Apples don't ship well till we've had some frost."

The children thought Peter Pepps—perhaps his name was part of his charm—delightful, and even when he talked business matters with his host and hostess, they listened attentively. You could never tell when his hearty laugh would break out, and when he laughed he had a habit of drawing up his knee till it hit the table and all the dishes in his vicinity danced little jigs.

"Mother scolds me 'bout that," he said regretfully, when the butter plate leaped in the air to Ward's wordless ecstasy. "Mustn't pattern after my manners," he warned the children. "'Twouldn't do if all the plates and cups and saucers went bouncing up and down."

After lunch he and Mr. Williamson went out on the shady side porch to talk, and the six Riddle Club members wandered out into the side yard. It was too warm even to ask riddles, Margy declared.

"I certainly am glad we're not going back to school right away," Fred said, stretching out full length on the grass.

"Wouldn't it be awful!" shuddered Jess.

Polly, who could never bear to be idle long, announced that she was going in to get her crocheting.

"Get mine, too," said Margy. "I left it on the davenport in the living-room—you can find it, right on top of the pillows."

Polly ran upstairs and found her own work in its neat bag, readily enough. But when she felt around on the davenport in the living-room, it was several minutes before she could find Margy's newly started lace and ball of thread.

The room was darkened to keep out the heat and light, and the davenport was directly across the bay window that opened on the side porch. As Polly felt swiftly over the pillows she heard Mr. Williamson and Peter Pepps talking. It was several minutes before she realized what they were saying.

"So you see, it's vastly important for me to go, and Mrs. Williamson would like to go with me," sounded Mr. Williamson's voice. "She hasn't seen her mother for sixteen years."

Polly, searching frantically for the elusive fancy work, heard the farmer's chair strike the side of the house as he tilted back comfortably.

"Certainly you ought to go," Mr. Pepps said decisively. "I don't see myself that there's any question about that. It's your testimony they

need, and I'd do that much for any business firm, let alone friends like Blake and Dormer. Wire them you'll be right along."

Polly had found the crochet cord by this time, but there was no sign of a needle. Margy was notoriously careless about her belongings.

"Well, I'll tell you what you do," the farmer offered slowly. "You just—"

Polly jabbed her finger with the hook, caught it up with the cord, and fled to the side yard. She had not meant to listen.

"How can you run on a day like this?" reproved Margy. "What took you so long?"

"I couldn't find your work," Polly explained. "The ball of thread had fallen down behind a pillow and the crochet hook was under the davenport. I hope the lace hasn't raveled."

"Only a little," said Margy, examining it.

Jess busied herself with making grass rings—she didn't care for needle work—and the boys lay idly on the grass, listening to Artie tell one of the innumerable stories with which he often beguiled them. Artie drew freely on his memory and imagination, and his friends sometimes said he ought to have his stories "printed."

"—and the Prince said he was all out of magic," Artie was reciting as Polly joined the group. "But he had something just as good—"

"Don't let Dad hear you saying that," warned Fred. "It's a phrase he tells every new clerk we get is never to be used in his store."

"This is different," Artie insisted. "The Prince hadn't any magic, but he knew how to get across the river."

"In a boat," suggested Ward, who was as literal-minded as Artie, but without his flair for fiction.

"I told you there wasn't any boat," Artie retorted. "All the Prince did was to open his mouth and shout——"

"Children!" called Mrs. Williamson unexpectedly. "Children—all of you! Come up here a minute! I want to speak to you."

They laughed a little at the unceremonious ending to Artie's story as they ran over to the side porch. Peter Pepps was beaming and Mr. and Mrs. Williamson looked unaccountably pleased.

"Sit down and be comfortable," Mrs. Williamson told them smilingly. "We have something interesting to tell you. Now, Daddy——" and she looked at her husband expectantly.

"It's like this," said Mr. Williamson with the directness that was characteristic of him. "I've had a letter from a city out West, where there is litigation in court in which one of the firms I deal with is involved. I could help them out with some

rather valuable testimony that they don't even know I possess. But the question has been, how to make the trip?"

"We could keep house," Polly said, exchanging looks with Margy and Jess.

"Well, Mrs. Williamson wouldn't know a moment's peace if we went off and left you six youngsters to the mercies of Dora and your own devices," declared Mr. Williamson, his eyes beginning to twinkle. "I could go and leave Mrs. Williamson, but I don't think the prospect pleases her."

"I could manage, but it wouldn't be easy," said Mrs. Williamson, smiling a little, too.

"Now, then, we'll say that Mother and I have to go West—by the way, Margy and Fred, Mother will stop off and visit Grandma, if we go—and we have six children to provide for. What do we do?" and Mr. Williamson looked at the half dozen solemn young faces staring at him.

"I'll tell you what you do," spoke up Peter Pepps promptly. "You send every last chick of them up to Shadybrook. We like young folks and we're used to 'em and I think most of them end up by liking us."

"On a farm?" asked Fred delightedly. "Gee, wouldn't it be great to get out into the country again before school opens!"

"More fun than the beach, because we've been there," Ward chimed in.

"Oh-h," squealed Artie. "What fun!" and he dived off the porch and was starting around the corner of the house when Mr. Williamson's voice stopped him.

"Artie Marley, come back here, you young scamp! Where do you think you are going?" asked Mr. Williamson, as Artie came slowly back to the steps.

"Carrie Pepper," Artie explained, not very lucidly. "I saw her yesterday and she said nothing ever happens. So I thought I'd tell her something did."

It was impossible to follow Artie's mental processes. No one knew what whim had made him resolve to tell Carrie Pepper at that instant. Polly pulled him down beside her on the step and kept a firm hold on his sleeve.

"Better wait till there is something to tell," counseled Mr. Williamson. "You haven't waited for Mr. Pepps to finish."

Artie looked a trifle abashed, but the farmer smiled at him and nodded cheerfully.

"Who is Carrie Pepper?" he asked genially. "Some friend you'd like to have come up to the farm with you? There's always room for one more and Mother would be delighted."

In spite of Mrs. Williamson's warning signal, her husband put back his head and roared with laughter. And even above the sound of his shouts, the voice of Fred was heard, rising in terrible wrath.

"Now you see what you've done!" he thundered at the unhappy Artie. "Spoiled the whole thing! I hope you're satisfied!"

"Fred, Fred," his mother cautioned. "Oh, Tom, do stop laughing." This to her husband. "Mr. Pepps will think we have all gone crazy."

Mr. Williamson wiped his eyes, still shaking with laughter.

"Peter won't mind us," he said, trying to speak calmly. "I happened to be watching Fred when Carrie's name was mentioned."

"Do keep still—the poor girl might hear you," Mrs. Williamson said nervously. "Mr. Pepps, do please forgive us. Carrie Pepper is a neighbor's child, and I am sure her mother wouldn't consent to let her go. They've just come home from the beach, too."

"Well, that's all right," said kindly Peter Pepps. "I just thought perhaps she'd fit into the party. Jennie—that's my wife—used to have a bunch of fresh air kids up to the place every summer when she was younger. We both liked it and the children had a fine time."

This proved to be an excellent diversion.

"Are there any fresh air kids there now?" Jess asked eagerly.

"Not a one," said the farmer. "We need some children to wake us up."

"Artie's fresh enough," Ward murmured, but Artie heard him and launched himself upon his tormentor.

Together they rolled down the steps, but this performance was too frequent to disturb the family.

"Are you really going West, Mother?" asked Margy.

"Yes, dear. And we have a good deal to do to get ready," Mrs. Williamson answered. "Daddy wants to get off with as little delay as possible. If I can get you children started by day after to-morrow, then Daddy and I can get away the next day."

"I'm going back to-night," said the farmer. "But I'll be on hand to meet you young folks twenty minutes to five day after to-morrow. You get off at Hayville and ask for Uncle Peter."

"So that's what worried your mother," said Polly to Margy, as the girls were getting ready for bed that evening. "She didn't know how she could go away and leave us."

"Children are a great care," Margy sighed, trying to part her hair a new way.

"I wonder if we'll like Aunt Jennie?" said Jess, who was already in bed.

"I hope so. We shall if she's as nice as Mr. Pepps."

That night it was some time before Jess and Polly could get to sleep. At first they thought of the Pepps and Shadybrook, but then their thoughts shifted to their fathers and mothers. What were they doing now and what would they say about the proposed trip to the farm "all by themselves"?

"Oh, dear, I wish they were back," sighed Jess to herself. "Somehow, I'd feel so much—safer."

Little did Jess and Polly, and Artie and Ward, for the matter of that, dream of all that was to take place before they were to see their mothers and fathers again.

CHAPTER X

PACKING TO DO

THE next day the Williamson household rose two hours earlier than usual, to begin a bustling day of such activity and interest that poor Carrie Pepper, observing the "goings out and comings in" of the animated family, was well nigh beside herself with the effort to find out what they were doing.

As usual, Artie was her informant. She waylaid him as he was dashing through the yard and asked bluntly:

"Is anybody sick?"

"Sick? No. Why?" Artie asked in astonishment.

"Well, you've all been uptown and the laundry wagon has been there and it's only Wednesday," said Carrie. "And I've heard the telephone bell ring seven different times. There's Dora with some things to hang out, too, and she did the regular wash Monday. Mother said so."

"We're going away," Artie blurted.

"You are! Where?"

"Up to Hayville, to stay at Shadybrook farm," said Artie complacently.

"Who's going?" Carrie demanded.

Artie gave a comprehensive sweep with his arm that seemed to include two rose bushes and a lilac bush.

"Everybody," said he.

"Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and Polly and——" began Carrie, but Artie hastened to correct her.

"Mr. and Mrs. Williamson are going out West," he explained. "Mr. Williamson has to testify in a lawsuit. But the rest of us are going to Shadybrook."

"Is Dora?" Carrie inquired.

"Dora's going to visit her married sister," said Artie.

What else he would have disclosed, having unburdened himself of the main facts, is not known, for just at that moment Polly called him. Carrie retreated to the house, satisfied at last, and the preparations for the journey went on.

"I'd rather work my head off like this and get everything done up in one day," Polly confided to Dora, as together they cleared out bureau drawers. "When you spread packing over a whole week, somehow it isn't half as much fun."

It had been decided that one trunk for the girls and another for the boys would be ample. Mrs.

Williamson gave them many instructions as to how they were to care for their clothes and charged Polly and Fred and Margy and Jess, as the older ones, to see that Artie and Ward did not appear at the table with make-shift toilets. Artie, in particular, was so literary that he frequently neglected to comb his hair. At least, that was the excuse Mr. Williamson offered in his behalf.

The trunks were packed and sent off before noon, and then Dora set about putting up a lunch. The Riddle Club would take the half-past-nine train at the Junction and would not reach Hayville till nearly five. It was Mr. Williamson who gave them their train instructions, and very proud indeed Fred felt with the six tickets in his own pocket. Artie and Ward both suggested that each carry his own ticket, but Fred was sure that wouldn't be a good plan, and his father backed him.

"I don't know whether they ought to take that long ride alone," worried Mrs. Williamson at luncheon. "I suppose you'll put them in charge of the conductor. But even then I am not sure one of us shouldn't go with them."

"Can't be done, Mother," Mr. Williamson said cheerfully. "They're old enough to behave in public, and as they do not have to change cars

there is no possible chance of any mix-up. We can't go with them, not and get off on Friday."

"And you're sure Mrs. Pepps is nice and kind and jolly?" urged Mrs. Williamson, who naturally felt responsible, not so much for the happiness of her own children as for the welfare of the children who had been left in her charge by the absent fathers and mothers.

"Mrs. Pepps is a combination of Mrs. Santa Claus and Mother Goose," declared Mr. Williamson. In his younger years he had spent many days at Shadybrook. "The kids will dote on her and she will spoil them so completely that when we come back and settle down to living with them once more, we'll have to spank them all soundly and put them to bed before we can have any peace."

Six pairs of shining eyes regarded him with rapture, apparently not at all alarmed. The Riddle Club members were, as Margy expressed it, "just crazy" to see Shadybrook. The hot weather had been more trying than any one had been willing to admit, and the long days, after the free outdoor life at Sunrise Beach, had dragged a little. Now they were looking forward to a trip on the train to an entirely new destination, and of course new adventures and new acquaintances must be in store for them.

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When they went up to bed that night, Fred's shout of laughter and the sound of Artie protesting, drew them all to the upper floor.

"I just got my things ready—I don't see anything funny about that," said Artie, blushing furiously at this wholesale audience.

"He thinks he's going to get up in the morning and step right into 'em," crowed Fred, pointing to the chandelier in the center of the room.

Artie had hung his best suit from the center of the fixture and directly beneath it had arranged his shoes, neatly blackened and polished. His socks flowered from his shoes, a clean handkerchief was in the pocket of his suit, and, crowning glory, his hat was carefully placed on the electric light bulb nearest the suit.

"Never mind, Artie," Mrs. Williamson comforted him. "In the morning Fred will be racing around trying to find his clothes, and you will know exactly where yours are."

"Yes, but, Mother, when I first came into the room, I thought it was Artie," said Fred. "Do we have to sleep with that thing in here?"

"It won't bother you—go to sleep and don't play," his mother cautioned him. "Remember you have a journey before you to-morrow."

It was Fred's turn to sleep on the porch, and this reconciled him to the limp figure that dangled

so grotesquely from the chandelier. The night was intensely warm and the shrill chatter of the insects sounded incessantly from the lawns. Fred settled himself comfortably, wished, irritated for a moment, that Artie and Ward would stop whispering, and in a few minutes was in dreamless slumber.

But Ward and Artie, usually the first to drop off, could not sleep. They were excited about what was coming and then, too, the room was very close. They had left the door into the hall open, but the upper floor of the house seemed to retain the heat of the sun long after the lower floor had cooled.

"Say, I can't sleep up here," whispered Ward desperately, after turning and tossing for half an hour or so. "My mother lets us take quilts downstairs on hot nights and sleep on the floor. Let's do that."

"Mrs. Williamson might not like it," Artie answered, mopping his hot little face and wishing he had a drink of ice water.

"She won't care. Anyway, we can come back upstairs before breakfast," said Ward.

"We haven't any quilts," Artie interposed.

"You're a great help, aren't you?" scolded poor Ward, who always suffered in hot weather. "Take your blanket and come on."

Artie was not sleepy and he was uncomfortably warm. He decided that rather than be left alone —a sleeping Fred on the porch couldn't be counted as company—he would follow whither Ward led.

The two boys crept cautiously out of the room, each hugging a blanket tightly to him.

"Where are those silly stairs?" grumbled Ward, trying to remember how the hall looked in the day time.

"Ow-ump!" Artie heard him grunt a moment later.

"What's the matter?" he whispered fearfully. "I walked into a door," said Ward in a low tone, but a savage one. "I wish we had a light. You're always using up your flashlight on things that don't count, and then when we need a light the battery is burnt out."

Ward's fault-finding was excusable. He was finding it a difficult matter to navigate the upper hall of the Williamson house, whereas he could go anywhere in his own house blindfolded and never miss his way.

"Here's the staircase," he gulped, having just saved himself from tumbling down the stairs head first by waving an exploring foot before him before he trusted himself to advance. "Don't make any noise."

Getting down the stairs was a precarious feat,

for the house was pitch dark and the street light, which usually shone in at the windows and gave some illumination, had been turned off early that evening for repairs. River Bend had not many street lights, but one of this number was on Elm Road near the homes of the Riddle Club members.

"Let's stop in the bathroom and get a drink of water," suggested Artie. "I'm thirsty."

"So am I, but we can get one in the kitchen," Ward told him. "You might drop the glass in the bathtub again and wake every one up."

This had been the latest calamity to befall Artie —the night before, going to the bathroom for a drink of water, he had let the glass slip from his hands and it had showered into tiny splinters in the porcelain tub, arousing the household, which had barely settled itself for sleep. No wonder Ward thought they had better wait till the kitchen sink was reached.

"Come on. Here's the front stairs," Ward whispered, guiding Artie by his elbow.

They reached the head of the stairs with Artie slightly in the lead. Unfortunately his blanket was trailing behind him. Unfortunately, too, the Williamson cat had chosen this warm night to sleep at the top of the stairs in the hope of receiving some breeze from the front door which had

been left open, with only the screen door fastened.

Artie trod squarely on the cat. She leaped and gave him a wicked dig on his bare leg. He yelled in pain and fright, stumbled, and pitched down the stairs.

Ward had been standing on the corner of Artie's blanket as it lay on the floor and he was drawn after his friend. Boys and cat and blankets rolled down the steps together, hideous sounds of wrath and alarm filling the quiet night air.

CHAPTER XI

HALF A DOZEN TRAVELERS

BUMP! Bump! Bump!

"What is it?" called Margy's voice, panic-stricken. "Moth-er!"

"Get off of me, you idiot!" squeaked Artie, and he sounded almost incoherent with rage.

The lights flashed on as Mr. Williamson found and pushed the switch in the upper hall.

"Tom! The children!" gasped Mrs. Williamson.

Down from the third floor tumbled Fred, rubbing his eyes as he stepped into the glare of light.

"What happened?" he demanded.

Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and the three girls and Fred crowded about the head of the stairs. A trail of blanket, mid-way on the steps, directed their attention to the struggling, squirming mass on the hall floor.

"It's Ward and Artie," said Fred.

As if they had been called, Ward and Artie sat up with a jerk, having managed to free their arms and heads from the muffling blanket.

"Did you fall downstairs?" Mrs. Williamson asked anxiously.

"I—I guess so," admitted Artie, shamefacedly.

"What in the world were you doing, floating around at this time of night?" Margy questioned.

Mr. Williamson looked as though he wanted to laugh.

"Perhaps you were surprised while attempting to raid the er—pantry?" was his suggestion.

"Ward had a bright idea," growled Artie, whose elbows and legs were smarting from his recent tumble.

"I thought we could sleep downstairs—on the blankets," Ward explained. "It was so hot, and my mother lets us stay downstairs when it is so hot."

"It *is* like an oven upstairs," agreed Fred. "You don't care, do you, Mother? I'll get my blanket, too."

"If you won't take cold, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't sleep on the living-room floor," Mrs. Williamson said cheerfully. "Of course, you are too young to mind how hard a bed like that can be. But, Artie and Ward, are you positive you are not hurt?"

Mr. Williamson went down and felt carefully of the "remains," as he would persist in calling

the two explorers, and pronounced them both "sound as a dollar." Then Fred came down with his blanket and Mrs. Williamson and the three girls went sleepily back to bed. Before they could drowse off again, however, a great shout of laughter came from downstairs. Mr. Williamson was laughing as hard as any of the boys.

"Daddy!" called Mrs. Williamson warningly. Polly and Margy and Jess, listening, heard Mr. Williamson come up the stairs, chuckling to himself.

"Know what tripped Artie and Ward?" they heard him say to his wife—the bedroom doors were all open, because of the stifling heat. "Artie stepped on the cat—he has several long scratches on his leg to show for it—and he fell down and dragged Ward, who was standing on the edge of his blanket. And both those boys kicked the cat on the way down."

Polly and Margy and Jess giggled a little, too, as they pictured poor Artie and Ward and the unfortunate cat tumbling down the stairs in the darkness.

Dora was the only one who had not been awakened by the rumpus, and she was up at the appointed time the next morning and called the others.

"My land, good gracious!" cried the startled girl as she walked into the living-room and almost stepped on the prostrate Artie.

"We came down to sleep—it was so hot," Ward told her, clutching his blanket around him and scuttling for the door.

Fred and Ward galloped upstairs, but Artie, the curious, lingered.

"Have you seen the cat, Dora?" he inquired anxiously.

"Not yet," said Dora. "She may have decided to spend the night over at the Peppers'—Mrs. Pepper is going to feed her while the house is closed, you know."

"She didn't spend all the night at Mrs. Pepper's," Artie affirmed in the tone of one who knew what he was talking about.

Of course the boys had to take a good deal of teasing at the breakfast table and the three girls asked a number of pointed questions. But there was the excitement of getting off to distract their attention.

Dora was to stay till the next morning and help the Williamsons close the house, so all the girls and boys had to do was to see that they were dressed in time and that the two lunch boxes were put in the car. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were going with them to the Junction, and when they

started, Fred's father called to Mrs. Pepper, who with Carrie was leaning over the hedge, that he felt as though he was taking a boarding school out for a drive.

"Won't it be fun to go to a perfectly strange place?" cried Margy, bouncing on the cushions as though she were five, instead of twice that age.

"And have a new Uncle Peter and an Aunt Jennie," Jess said, smiling as though the prospect pleased her.

"I hope you'll all be happy and I know you'll try your best not to give a speck of trouble," said Mrs. Williamson earnestly. "Mrs. Pepps is so good to let you all come. I don't know of any other home where I would care to send six dear children and where I could feel that their fathers and mothers would feel as safe about them as Mr. Williamson and I do about you now."

"We'll be good," the Riddle Club promised, and then they gave Fred's pretty mother a rather wholesale farewell as the car drew up at the Junction platform.

Mrs. Williamson straightened her hat after the onslaught of kisses and hugs and seemed to like the effects.

"I ought to count noses," said Mr. Williamson, as the travelers stepped out of the car and turned expectantly toward the gleaming, polished rails.

"We're all here, Daddy," Margy assured him.

"The train's coming!" shrieked Artie, and darted forward.

Mrs. Williamson stayed in the car, while her husband went with the boys and girls and the lunch boxes. These last were very important—Fred and Ward always spoke of them as though they were members of the party.

"Are the lunch boxes here?" Fred asked, when they turned away from the car.

There is always something thrilling about the long train that pulls into a station, and stands puffing and panting while the passengers scurry to board it. Even much more seasoned travelers than the River Bend friends had felt the charm of the iron monster that was the engine, and as for Ward and Artie, it became necessary to drag them past the engine and propel them firmly and forcibly forward till they reached the car where the white-haired conductor was standing.

"I'd like to put the Riddle Club in your charge," said Mr. Williamson gravely.

"Riddle Club?" the conductor echoed.

"Six youngsters—here they are," said Mr. Williamson. "They're going to Hayville, and if you'll see that they get off at the right station—and drop them out of the windows, one by one, if

they can't behave till they reach their destination —why, I'll be greatly obliged to you."

The conductor laughed.

"So there's six of them, eh?" he said. "Quite a handful. Why, I should call that a whole club."

"We are," Ward declared proudly.

"Hop in, Riddle Club," the conductor invited. "You ought to find seats in the forward end of the car. And mind you have a riddle ready for me when I come round for the tickets."

He helped Polly and Margy and Jess up the steps, Fred leaped lightly after them and Ward hauled himself aboard with some difficulty. But Artie's feelings were seriously injured when a smiling young brakeman grabbed him and swung him up to the car platform saying:

"Here, peanut, don't hold up the whole works."

Artie couldn't retort for two reasons, one that the brakeman immediately disappeared. The other reason was that Mr. Williamson was waiting outside, watching the windows in the hope of seeing them established in their seats. So Artie wisely swallowed his wrath and followed Ward.

The Riddle Club were fortunate enough to find two vacant seats, which were all they needed. The boys turned the one over to face the one into which the three girls slipped at once, and that gave

them a cozy section to themselves. Three in a seat was a rather tight fit, but, as Polly observed, they would rather be together and be crowded than to be separated and have more space.

"There's Daddy!" cried Margy, standing up to wave through the window. "There's Mother, too—see her?"

The train started at that moment, but before it got fully under way, the Riddle Club had enthusiastically waved six handkerchiefs at Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and Ward had let his sail through the open window, too.

"Never mind—I brought you a clean one," said Jess, as they settled into their seats again. "I meant to keep it till we were almost at Hayville, but if you need it before that, let me know."

"Don't forget that we have to have a riddle for the conductor," Ward said, apparently not at all interested in handkerchiefs.

The windows were open throughout the car, for it was an exceedingly warm day. Jess sat next the window on one seat, Margy next to her and Polly on the aisle. On the opposite seat were wedged Artie, nearest the window, then Ward and on the aisle, Fred. Ward was not exactly comfortable, because he was stout and really needed more room than he had.

"Ouch!" he startled his fellow passengers be-

fore they had covered five miles of the journey.

"Quit jamming me in the ribs," Fred reproved him. "Can't you sit still?"

"I've got a cinder in my eye," complained Ward. "Gee, it hurts like—like anything!"

"Let me take it out," said Fred. "Get out of the way, Artie—move over and let me get a good light."

There was absolutely no place for Artie to move over, so he stood up, and Fred pushed Ward into his place.

"You take wet paper," Artie instructed Fred. "I read it in a book."

"Roll his eye over a match stick," the interested Margy contributed.

Ward bellowed and clapped a hasty hand to his injured eye.

"I won't have my eye rolled over a match stick," he cried rebelliously.

Margy murmured that she meant his eyelid, not his eye, but Fred was not listening.

"Do sit still," he commanded crossly. "A cinder won't kill you. How do you expect me to take it out if you're going to bounce all over the place?"

Polly saw that they were attracting the attention of other passengers in the car. An old lady was coming down the aisle toward them.

"Has the little boy something in his eye?" asked the old lady, kindly.

Ward, the tears rolling down his round face, nodded dumbly. It was the cinder that was responsible for the tears, for Ward could endure much real pain without crying.

"Let me see the eye," said the old lady.

The other members of the Riddle Club obediently slid out into the aisle and Ward crowded up against the window, as far away as he could get from the stranger.

By this time more than half the passengers in the car were crowding around, and Ward, who wasn't exactly shy and yet had never been known to covet public attention, began to look frightened.

"Where's your handkerchief?" the old lady asked, sitting down beside the victim of the cinder. "You'll feel safer if I use your own."

Jess extracted a clean, neatly folded handkerchief from her pocket and handed it over proudly.

"Just a minute——" said the old lady. "Just a minute—there!"

Ward winked—gulped—then smiled.

"Gee, you got it out, didn't you?" he said gratefully.

"Your eye will be red for a little while, but there's the cinder on your handkerchief," the old lady informed him.

Ward tried to thank his new friend, and the others joined him, but just then the brakeman threw open the door of the car and called a station.

"Oh, my! Here we are at Beaumont!" cried the old lady who had taken out the cinder.

"Beaumont!" yelled the brakeman again.

"I must get out right here," the old lady declared excitedly, making for the door with a speed and agility that were amazing.

She scattered the passengers standing in the aisle right and left, banging them in the legs with a satchel she had picked up.

In a few minutes, there she was on the platform, being greeted by a very pretty young girl in a green linen dress and a parasol to match.

"Don't get any more cinders in your eye!" called the old lady, with a wave of her arm bag to Ward, as she glanced up and saw him at the window.

"She's funny, but she's nice," Margy declared, as the train started.

"Tickets!" they heard a moment later. "All tickets from the Junction and Beaumont!"

CHAPTER XII

WARD'S ADVENTURE

“THERE’s the conductor!” Artie sounded panic-stricken.

“And we haven’t any riddle for him!” said Ward, fearfully, too.

Fred laughed at them both.

“You don’t suppose he will put us off the train, do you?” he teased. “Hurry up, Ward. You’re the cause of all the confusion—dig up a riddle, quick, before the conductor gets to us.”

Ward glanced down the aisle and saw the white-haired, blue-uniformed conductor calmly punching the tickets held out to him. In a very few minutes he would come for the tickets Fred was holding in his hand.

“Gee, I know a peach of a riddle,” announced Artie, with explosive suddenness. “All but one word. Could I whisper to Polly?”

“Go ahead and be quick about it,” Fred commanded.

“Buz-z-z,” went Artie in a low tone to Polly,

who whispered a single word into his ear and nodded and smiled.

“Tickets!” came the call they had been expecting.

“Going to Hayville—I see,” said the conductor, as six pairs of interested eyes watched his shining nickel punch bite little round holes in six tickets. “How about that riddle you were going to have ready for me?”

Ward gave Artie a tremendous dig that nearly knocked the breath out of him.

“Tell him!” hissed Ward.

“I know a riddle,” Artie declared obediently. “I read it in a book. It goes like this:

“‘Round as an apple,
Shaped like a pear,
A shine in the middle,
Surrounded by hair.’”

The Riddle Club gazed at him with new respect. This was a riddle that they had not heard before. Polly knew it, but none of the others had ever tried to guess it.

The conductor scratched his head.

“Um,” he said thoughtfully. “That is a teaser. Round like an apple—shaped like a pear. Kind of confusing, isn’t it?”

"It isn't so hard," encouraged Artie.

"Not when you know the answer—no, I suppose not," the conductor agreed. "Riddles are like that."

He stared at Artie till that young person began to wriggle uneasily.

"Tell you what we'll do," said the conductor, apparently making up his mind. "I'll go on and kind of turn it over in my mind. I'll be coming through again in half an hour or so—after we pass Weymouth—and if I haven't guessed it by that time, you tell me the answer. How will that be?"

The Riddle Club thought this an excellent plan, and said so.

"We have to think it out ourselves," said Fred. "Polly and Artie know the answer, but none of the rest of us do."

"Well, don't let Polly and Artie forget the answer," the conductor replied, as he moved on down the aisle.

"I don't see where you got a riddle like that," announced Margy. "I wish I had a paper and pencil to work with."

"You couldn't draw something you didn't know the name of," Jess pointed out. "It's the 'round as an apple, shaped like a pear' that bothers me. All I can think of is an apple and a pear."

"Well, it isn't an apple and it isn't a pear," said Artie helpfully.

"I don't know of a thing that is surrounded by hair," Jess mused.

"Yes, you do," said Polly. "Only you can't think of it."

"I think it's a silly riddle," Ward pronounced, rubbing his reddened eye tenderly.

To his surprise both Polly and Artie burst into laughter.

"You're so funny," snickered the latter. "Gee, Ward, if you only knew how funny you are!"

No one likes to be considered a joke, and Ward was no exception to the general rule.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he said quickly.

Polly, always kind, tried to placate him.

"It's just the riddle," she explained, dimpling. "You're not funny, Ward. It's just because of the riddle."

Margy and Jess were too busy trying to evolve an answer to see any kind of joke.

But try as they could, the train pulled into Weymouth station before any one had succeeded in finding an answer to Artie's riddle.

"There are apples and pears," said Margy, her mind still running on the riddle verse. "Don't they look good?"

"Why can't we get some?" Ward suggested.

"You won't have time—don't you dare to get off the train!" Jess said hurriedly.

"No, don't get off," commanded Fred. "I don't believe we'll stay here long, and you'd feel nice to be left standing on the platform, wouldn't you?"

This decided Artie, but Ward could not take his gaze off the apples and pears that were heaped in polished pyramids at each corner of the fruit stand.

"I'd have plenty of time," he said to himself.

Something on the platform attracted the attention of the others and they stood up to look out of the window. Ward slipped along the seat and gained the aisle unnoticed.

Passengers were still boarding the train and trickling through the cars in an effort to find a vacant seat. Ward reached the platform and tumbled down the steps. He had some money in his pocket—a brand new dollar bill, to be exact, and he was not altogether selfish in his desire to get those entrancing apples and pears. He wanted to share the fruit with the others.

He was, as has been said before, a fat boy, and when he hurried he usually became quite breathless. By the time he had struggled down the car steps and made his way through the groups of

people to the fruit and paper stand, he was panting. Certainly he had no oversupply of breath with which to get back when there suddenly sounded the loud:

“All aboard! All a-board!”

“Apples!” gasped Ward, scarlet-faced, but with no intention of surrendering his object. “Pears!”

He held out the crisp dollar bill and the tall man in the booth, which was open on all four sides, put his hand behind him, dragged out a large brown paper bag and dumped it into Ward's arms.

“There you are!” he said cheerfully.

Ward had expected some change, but evidently his whole dollar was spent, for the man went on polishing apples as though his part in the transaction was finished.

“Ward!” shouted Fred, who had caught sight of the fat boy. “You, Ward Larue! Come back here!”

The train was beginning very slowly to move, and now Ward tried to run, holding the heavy bag tightly in his arms.

But when he was near enough to jump for the steps, his courage failed him. The cars “slithered,” he confided to Polly later, and car after car went past him. Suddenly some one caught hold of him and pulled him up with a tremendous heave.

"Lost your mind completely?" said a severe voice. "Ought to keep you in the baggage car with the parrot that can't say anything except 'I want to go! I want to go!'"

Ward found himself standing on the platform of the last car, the young brakeman holding him tightly by the collar and one sleeve of his jacket.

"Don't you know that's how half the accidents happen?" scolded the brakeman. "Never, never jump for a moving train."

"I—I—didn't—I—wasn't," Ward mumbled.

"Well, you were going to," said the brakeman. "Better to miss your train than be run over by it. Now let's see—where do you belong? Didn't you get on with that crowd of youngsters at the Junction?"

Ward nodded. He felt very small and very, very meek indeed.

"Then back you come with me," the brakeman declared. "And don't you ever let me see you doing a foolish stunt like this again. Remember!"

Ward's embarrassment grew as they walked through the train. It was evident that his escapade had been noted by many of the passengers, and as he trotted on before the brakeman, he heard whispers on all sides.

"There's the boy now!"

"That's the one! He almost fell under the train."

"I hope his mother gives him a talking to! The idea of running off by himself like that and almost getting killed!"

Ward's face grew redder and redder, and as they stepped into each car and the long line of heads turned toward him and a battery of curious eyes surveyed him, he wished he could hide behind the tall figure of the brakeman.

"Better be careful, Bub—being reckless never gets you anywhere," one man told him.

Ward wanted to shout in desperation that he hadn't jumped for the train or fallen beneath the wheels or been reckless. He was sure now that he would never have tried to jump on the moving car steps and that if the brakeman had not lifted him up he would still be standing on the platform. But he couldn't utter a word, and when he finally reached the car where his friends were, he found himself the center of an interest that threatened to be more overwhelming than anything he had yet endured.

The Riddle Club members had spent some anxious minutes, wondering whether Ward had been left behind or not. Now, when they saw him, as often happens, their anxiety was replaced by irritation.

"Who do you think you are, anyway?" demanded Fred. "Nice way to perform—going off like that and almost getting left."

"Were you run over?" Artie inquired, with more curiosity than feeling, the sensitive Ward perceived.

"You don't want to take a chance like that, little boy," said a severe-looking woman, joining the group which stood around the unfortunate Ward, eyeing him eagerly.

"What have you got in the bag?" asked Jess suddenly.

"Apples and pears," Ward replied, glad that at last he could say something.

Jess dropped back into the seat and began to shriek with laughter. The others chimed in, and Artie slid off to the floor, doubled up with mirth that seemed to the bewildered Ward to be utterly without rhyme or reason.

"It's too funny," gasped Margy, wiping her eyes. "Look!"

CHAPTER XIII

RIDDLES AND EGGS

MARGY tugged frantically at the cover of one of the lunch boxes, succeeded in yanking it off, and held out the box to Ward.

“Huh!” he said, which was, he felt, a lame ejaculation, but all he was equal to at that precise moment.

The box was neatly packed with apples and pears, placed there by the thoughtful Dora.

“I think you might have told me,” said Ward presently.

The other passengers went back to their seats and the brakeman was turning away, too—the excitement was over—when to his astonishment Ward thrust the paper bag into his hands.

“Take ‘em,” he said. “We have some in a box.”

“But—but——” the brakeman stammered, “won’t you want them after a while? Take them with you and eat them to-night.”

"We're going to a farm," explained the disconsolate Ward. "You don't need pears and apples on a farm."

"Well, no, that's true," the brakeman admitted. "I'll take them then, and much obliged to you. And the next time you go shopping, let me know and I'll see that you get back in time."

He went off with the bag of fruit and Ward settled himself in the place next the window. His dollar was gone and he felt sorry about that for a moment or two, but soon forgot it. He wasn't much given to worrying, when something was over and done.

"Let's eat," he suggested, hoping to take Fred's mind off the painful subject of his recent adventure.

"We're going to wait till the conductor comes through—he said he'd be along as soon as we left Weymouth," said Polly. "We don't want to be eating and talking about riddles at the same time—that is so messy."

Ward couldn't see the point, but he knew that girls had different ideas from boys on subjects of this kind, so he made up his mind to wait as patiently as possible.

"The next time you go off like that without saying a word," Fred began, but before his lecture

could get into full swing, the "click-click" of the conductor's punch was heard.

"Haven't guessed that riddle yet," he said, when he came to the Riddle Club members. "What's this I heard about you, young man? Going off to shop and almost getting left? I hope you had more sense than to try to jump on a moving train?"

"Yes, sir," gulped Ward, his face such a brilliant scarlet that the conductor had pity on him and let the matter drop.

"But about that riddle," he went on. "I've racked my brains, and I can't get the answer. 'Fraid I'll have to give it up."

Artie looked vastly important. For once in his short life he had propounded a beautiful riddle—an elaborate and intricate riddle that no one, not even a white-haired conductor in a blue uniform, could guess.

"Want me to tell you?" suggested Artie kindly.

"Go to it—have to be on my way," the conductor said quickly.

"An eye," said Artie.

"But I've forgotten the riddle," Margy protested. "Say it again, Artie. How did it go?"

And Artie, nothing loath, sat up very straight and recited the verse again:

"Round as an apple,
Shaped like a pear,
A shine in the middle,
Surrounded by hair."

"Ha-ha!" laughed the conductor. "An eye is good. Yes, sir, that's a first-class riddle, and I'll tell it to my little grandson to-morrow night. 'Round as an apple, shaped——'" and he went out of the car, still chuckling.

"Well, for pity's sake!" Margy's voice went up as it sometimes did when she was protesting. "Well, for pity's sake! I don't see how that can be the answer."

"It's a good answer—let's eat," said Ward wistfully.

"Of course it's a good answer," Artie affirmed. "What's the matter with it? An eye is just like that—when you stop to think of it. Isn't it, Polly?"

"Why, yes," said Polly, a little uncertainly. "Yes, I think it is. 'Surrounded by hair,' you know."

They discussed the riddle and its answer as they opened the other lunch box. It was then that Margy remembered to explain to Ward that the way they had happened to find out that Dora had packed apples and pears in one of the boxes was

when Artie had stepped on it in his eagerness to get to the window to see Ward on the platform.

"Artie stepped on the cover and we saw what was inside," said Margy. "Wasn't it funny, Ward?"

"You won't think it's so funny," Ward responded, taking a satisfactory bite of sandwich, "when Fred tries to collect my club dues. I haven't any money left."

The others giggled, but Fred heard this announcement seriously.

"You mean to tell me you've spent that whole dollar on fruit?" he thundered. "A whole dollar gone and nothing to show for it? And when it comes time to pay dues you'll have the nerve to sit there and say you haven't got a cent?"

"You needn't tell the whole car about it," cautioned Margy.

"Don't try to scold and eat at the same time, Fred," Polly advised him. "It's very bad for your digestion—I read that in a book, as Artie would say."

Fred laughed, but he continued to stare balefully at Ward.

"Where are the boiled eggs?" asked Polly tactfully, hoping to create a diversion.

"Dora put some in," said Margy. "Look around—she said she wouldn't peel them because

they carry better in the shells. Want a boiled egg, Fred?"

Fred did—it was remarkable how keen an appetite every one had—and Dora had "counted noses," for there were just twelve hard-boiled eggs for the eager consumers.

"Don't drop crumbs—do be neat," Polly begged them, as she saved the salt from spilling out of the paper cup Jess passed at a reckless angle.

Artie had every intention in the world of following his sister's advice. He liked neatness himself and he was always reproving Ward for being indifferent to details. But it was Artie who came to grief now as he helped himself to his second egg. It slipped from his fingers and started rolling gayly down the aisle.

"Now you've done it!" gurgled Ward, glad to have some one else step into the limelight.

"Don't go after it—leave it alone," Fred said in a rapid undertone, as Artie would have started in pursuit.

"But I want to eat it," protested Artie.

"Well, you can't. Eat another sandwich," Fred commanded.

Artie looked wistfully down the aisle, in spite of Fred, made a hasty search, but found that his

egg had disappeared. He resigned himself to the attractions of a peanut butter sandwich.

"I suppose somebody went and ate it," he thought a little resentfully. "Next time, I'll eat my eggs first."

They all laughed a little when they came to the box of fruit, remembering poor Ward's disastrous marketing attempt. Polly carefully gathered up all scraps and bits of paper and with Margy's help, tied them into the now empty boxes, ready to be thrown away. When everything was neat again, they amused themselves by looking up Hayville on the timetable and counting the number of stations that still remained before they reached their destination.

"Here's a funny place," said Fred. "Ambrosia! Imagine living in a place called Ambrosia!"

"I think it is a pretty name," Jess declared stoutly.

"Like flowers and things," agreed Margy rather vaguely.

"Well, it's the next stop," Fred informed them. "We'll see if any 'flowers and things' get on."

The trip to Hayville was a longer ride than the children had undertaken before, and while lunch had made a pleasant break—to say nothing of the unpleasant break Ward's adventure had

been—now they could not help feeling a bit of the natural restlessness that attacks active young people who are forced to stay in cramped quarters for any length of time. They welcomed Fred's suggestion that they watch for Ambrosia and see what kind of people got on the train.

"We're coming to it," said Margy, mopping her face with a handkerchief that was already slightly grimy.

The brakes gripped the wheels and the train slowed down, while Fred gripped Ward and Polly took a firm hold on the knee of Artie's knickerbockers, lest these enthusiastic observers tumble from the window head foremost.

"I told you it was a pretty name," cried Jess triumphantly. "It's a pretty place, too."

Ambrosia was surely a pretty place. There were exclamations from the other passengers as they saw the white stucco station set on a green lawn and almost covered with vines. The late summer flowers still blossomed in profusion, and the place looked more like some one's suburban home than a railroad station.

"I knew there would be flowers," said Margy contentedly.

There was a commotion on the platform, and a very elegant young man stepped up to the con-

ductor. The Riddle Club were excellently placed to hear what followed. Their windows were open and they could see the conductor standing almost directly beneath.

"Where are the chair cars?" said the elegant young man, raising a glass to his eye—"half an eye glass," Artie reported it in a shrill whisper to Fred, who was behind him.

"None on this train. We only run two stations beyond Hayville," the conductor answered pleasantly.

The elegant young man turned to another man behind him, who was loaded down with two suit-cases, a bag, a dog basket, and a bag of golf sticks.

"I thought you attended to the chairs, Peters," he said crossly.

"The telephone was out of order and I couldn't get any answer," the man addressed as "Peters" replied.

"Will there be any chairs on the next train?" the elegant young man inquired, while the Riddle Club members quite frankly stared at him, a scrutiny of which he was serenely unconscious.

"Never any on this run," said the conductor, snapping his watch shut. "Man, the end of the line is only four stations ahead."

"Well—get on, Peters, get on," the young man

ordered, walking toward the steps. "We'll have to put up with what we can get. These country trains are enough to drive one frantic."

"I hope he is coming into our car!" whispered Margy fervently.

"He is! He is!" Jess cried in a shrill whisper a moment later.

The members of the Riddle Club turned eagerly toward the door. They just caught a glimpse of light tweeds, saw Peters anxiously peering over his master's shoulder, and then—the elegant young man gave a tremendous lurch, recovered his balance, and kicked viciously at something that went sailing down the center of the car toward the door at the other end.

High and clear rose Artie's voice in a lilt of rapture.

"That's my egg!" he informed the world happily. "My hard-boiled egg!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HAYVILLE

POLLY blushed for her brother, but the others giggled and every one in the car who had overheard joined in the laughter.

The egg brought up with a crash against the iron frame of one of the seats and Artie went determinedly after it.

“I got it!” he announced enthusiastically.

Meanwhile, the elegant young man was voicing his opinion of “these day coaches where persons eat their lunches and scatter the refuse.” He was being settled in one of the vacant seats of which there were several now, as the train was rapidly approaching the last few stations on the line.

“He never could get out in a hurry,” Fred commented, watching with interest as the golf sticks and the luggage were grouped around their owner, forming an effective barrier against any possible attempts to share the seat with him.

“I wouldn’t mind seeing the dog,” murmured Polly.

Artie, placidly eating his egg, "to save it," gave it as his opinion that the dog wouldn't be much.

"Hayville is after the next station," said Margy. "I think we ought to kind of get ready."

Indeed they had already reached Crosswicks by this time and as the members of the Riddle Club knew, thanks to intensive study of their timetable, Hayville was the next station.

There was the bustle of preparation that always follows when travelers are getting into their hats and sorting out their coats, and almost before they were ready, the brakeman threw open the door and shouted:

"Hayville! Hayville!"

Left to himself, Ward would have gone out the other door, but he was carried along by the others and found himself directly in line with the brakeman's earnest gaze a moment later.

"Mind you keep out of mischief," said the brakeman severely. "Don't go monkeying with the mule's tail, and see to it that you leave anything with wheels on it strictly alone."

All the time he was talking he was helping the girls down the steps and purposely keeping Ward on the platform to listen to him. Now he swung Ward off and rumpled his hair affectionately to show that he bore no hard feelings.

Fred was already beginning to look around for

Mr. Pepps when Polly gave a little cry of dismay.

"Artie!" she gasped. "Where's Artie?"

The conductor came up hastily and the brakeman looked worried.

"What's that? What's the matter?" asked the conductor.

"Artie! My brother!" poor Polly explained.
"He isn't here!"

"I thought he was right behind me," said Fred.

The brakeman turned and dashed up the steps. They saw him disappear into the car and a few moments later he appeared, dragging Artie after him.

"This the missing brother?" he demanded. "I thought so—he was picking the lock on that dude's dog-basket."

The conductor laughed and Artie struggled furiously to free himself.

"I was not!" he cried indignantly. "I just wanted to see what kind of a dog it was and I did—it's a poodle. I said he wouldn't have much of a dog, and he didn't."

"Well, I hope you go back with us—but a few days' rest will be appreciated," said the brakeman, swinging Artie wide of the car and landing him neatly beside Fred.

"Everybody present and accounted for?" the conductor asked smilingly. "All a-board!"

132 RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADBROOK

The Riddle Club waved to their train friends, and then, as the train slid out of the station, looked about them for the first time.

Hayville station was a typical country station, dingy as to paint, dilapidated as to repairs, and discouraging as to cleanliness. There were cob-webs spun across the windows, all closed even on this warm day. There were bits of paper scattered over the platform. A large lamp, mounted on a post, was smoked on one side of the chimney.

"Where do you suppose Mr. Pepps is?" said Fred doubtfully.

Only two or three other passengers had got off with them, and these had disappeared.

"Let's go round on the other side of the station," Polly suggested.

"There he is!" cried Ward.

Two enormously large, fat horses stood, their heads hanging sleepily, harnessed to a large farm wagon. The harness looked strong, if unpolished, and though the wagon was dusty, it looked roomy and comfortable. On a board spread across the front and covered with a double thickness of blanket, sat Peter Pepps, dozing comfortably in spite of the noise the train had made.

"Hello! Hello!" He jerked his head up when he heard Ward. "Well, well, you got here, after all, didn't you? Hop right in. Glad to see you."

There was another blanketed board laid across the wagon, and with much laughing and a little shriek or two from Margy, who at first declared she couldn't make the high step, the Riddle Club arranged itself in two neat rows. Fred and Artie sat on the front seat, leaving the three girls and Ward to take the other.

"Hi, Peter! Pete Pepps!" called some one.

"Gr-ru-up!" said Peter Pepps comfortably, which probably meant, "Yes, what is it?"

"Got a trunk here for you. Want to take it over now?"

Mr. Pepps glanced inquiringly at his visitors.

"We brought two trunks," said Fred.

"Might as well take 'em along with us," the farmer replied slowly. "Bring your stuff out, Jasper," he added, raising his voice slightly.

A cheerful, whistling young giant appeared from around the corner of the station, a trunk on his back.

"Jasper Miles," said Mr. Pepps, with a wave of his hand. "Station agent, ticket agent, baggage master, and general skipper of the Hayville station."

Jasper blushed and let the trunk tumble into the wagon with a suddenness that nearly jarred Margy's teeth loose. She said so.

"Got another," said Jasper, and departed.

In a few minutes he was back with the second trunk, which he let slide into the wagon with the same effect of an earthquake.

"So long," he said, not looking at the children but nodding his head to Peter Pepps.

The farmer gathered up the reins and spoke to his team.

"Jasper's a little shy," he said, as the fat horses consented to break into a sedate walk.

Margy clutched Polly as the wagon started, and Jess began to laugh. Any new experience could be depended upon to give Jess an attack of the giggles.

"Sh-h!" whispered Polly, hoping that Fred would not turn and catch her eye.

The wagon was absolutely without springs, and if you have never had the sensation of riding in a springless wagon, you have no idea of how peculiar the feeling is. Margy was used, as were the others, to the easy riding motion of an automobile, and the solidness of the farm wagon was a revelation to her.

"Sorry the road's so dusty," said Mr. Pepps, as they drove through the short main street of the town. "We need rain. Have to walk the horses most of the way, or the dust will choke you."

There were six stores on Hayville's main street — Fred counted them. It was a tiny place, hardly

more than a cluster of a few houses, the stores, a blacksmith shop, the station and a creamery. In spite of the dust that lay white on the weeds bordering the road, the country through which they drove slowly that late afternoon was very beautiful.

"It's so quiet," said Margy. "Doesn't it seem good to get out of that dirty train?"

"I'd like to live in the country on a farm," Ward announced, a wish he frequently voiced.

"You can come any time and stay with me as long as you like," said Mr. Pepps, who seemed to be half asleep as he drove and yet who heard every word the children said and kept a sharp eye on his well-fed team.

A cloud of dust was being rapidly whirled toward them, and the farmer turned out to let the coming team pass with plenty of room.

"Whew!" gasped Fred, as a light runabout and a long, rangy horse spun by.

They were all choking with the dust, and even the team shook their heads as though they didn't like it.

"Doc Burns. Going on a case, I reckon," said Mr. Pepps mildly. "Nobody but the doctor drives fast when the roads are so dusty. Here's a brook we're coming to. Don't suppose any of you want a drink?"

They looked at him a little doubtfully even when he reined in his team.

"Can you drink brook water?" asked Fred. "I thought some of these streams—that is, you have to be careful sometimes——"

"There's a spring. Right there, coming out of the rock," Mr. Pepps assured him. "Cleanest water in three counties. Cold, too."

The members of the Riddle Club suddenly discovered how thirsty they were. Since their lunch on the train they had had nothing to drink, and the thought of ice-cold spring water was delicious. Nimblly they all hopped down from the wagon and found the clam shell that served as a cup.

The water was sparkling, clear and cold, and they drank gratefully. Mr. Pepps declared that he wasn't thirsty enough to get out of the wagon, but Artie carried him a shellful of the water and he drank it. Then they all resumed their places and the horses plodded on.

"What do you call them?" asked Artie, nodding toward the placid beasts.

"Pork and Beans," Mr. Pepps answered, placidly also.

"Po-rk—and Be-ans!" stammered Artie, while his chums listened in speechless amazement.

"It's like this," the farmer explained. "I raised these horses from colts. They've never been sep-

arated for a day. I wanted to name 'em David and Jonathan, but Mother won't let me call animals by names of folks—least of all Bible folks. So I had to have something that people always think of together, and I calculate that Pork and Beans go together."

Ward was charmed.

"I think Pork and Beans are great," he assured his host.

Polly wanted to laugh, but wasn't sure it would be considered polite, and in another minute Pork and Beans were trotting at such an increased rate of speed, all she could do was to cling to Margy and Jess and hope that Ward and the trunks would not be bounced out into the roadway. The dust flew up behind them in a white spray and it seemed to Polly that the heavy wheels were surely coming through the floor of the wagon.

"Are they running away?" shouted Artie hopefully.

It was necessary to shout because the wagon made a tremendous noise.

"Just going home," Mr. Pepps roared in answer. "The farm is at the foot of this hill, and Pork and Beans always break into a trot when we get this far."

Polly was sure they were galloping and that "trot" was altogether too mild a descriptive word.

"Take a look ahead—off through those trees—and you'll see Shadybrook," shouted Mr. Pepps, as they rattled across a tiny wooden bridge that gave out a hollow sound.

"Polly—I think I'm afraid of—of Mrs. Pepps," whispered Jess, in a sudden panic.

Something like this idea of Jess's was in each mind as the wagon rattled up to the old-fashioned horse-block under a large maple tree. What would Mrs. Pepps be like and would she really be glad to see them?

None of the children had seen a horse-block, and Artie—whose eyes missed nothing—saw a name carved on the top of the heavy gray granite.

"Don't step there!" he warned, as Margy put out one foot. "It's a tombstone! Don't walk on it!"

CHAPTER XV

SHADBROOK FARM

MARGY put her foot back and looked uncertain. Mr. Pepps, who had jumped down and gone around to the side of the wagon, chuckled as he heard Artie.

"Have to tell that to Mother," he said, his eyes crinkling. "Thinks a lot of this stone, Mother does. We bought it at the Carson sale twenty years ago. It isn't a tombstone, Artie."

"Carson" was the name engraved on the stone, and, assured that it was not a tombstone, Artie was willing to let the others hop out on it and finally leap there himself.

"Here's Mother!" said the farmer.

Hurrying toward them was a tall, angular woman, dressed in a gray print dress, very neat, but with no frills of any kind. Her hair was screwed up on the "tip top" of her head (so Polly wrote her mother) and her glasses perched on her nose at an angle that made each of the children immediately apprehensive. Those glasses looked

as though the slightest jar would send them flying and yet the Riddle Club soon learned that Mrs. Pepps always wore her glasses that way and no one had ever seen them fall off.

"I hope you'll excuse me for not coming right out," said Mrs. Peter Pepps, waiting for no introduction. "Amanda Haynes was on the telephone, and I'm sure there is no harm in telling you that she is the greatest talker in three counties, for you will find it out soon enough for yourselves. Amanda was giving me the recipe for a salad she read about in a magazine, and I couldn't ask her to stop, for she's a little touchy. I declare, I am certainly glad to see you. I said to Father only the other day that it would brighten up the old place to have some young folks around. Three girls and three boys! Well, now, that certainly is nice! You can amuse yourselves. I was saying to Father I had a good mind to adopt a child, but it would be cruel to make him live here with us alone. We'd have to adopt two, and two children might be more than we could rightly look after."

The Riddle Club members stared at her in respectful awe. She had a pleasant voice, and her eyes—she looked over her spectacles at them, not through the glasses—were a faded blue and very kind. But never, never, in all their experience,



"ARE THEY RUNNING AWAY," SHOUTED ARTIE.

The Riddle Club at Shadybrook.

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had they heard a woman talk so fast and so continuously. Why, Carrie Pepper would have met her match after the first six sentences.

Peter Pepps was placidly letting down the tail-board of the wagon, and now he said something about the trunks.

"I'll take the children in and show them their rooms," his wife answered. "Barry is inside somewhere—I'll send him out to you."

All the time she was talking she was leading her visitors up the grass walk that led straight to a wonderful old gray house that seemed to hug the ground.

The doors of the gray house opened directly on the lawn, and there was a certain charm of novelty about walking up to the center door and entering the house without mounting any steps. But it wasn't so charming to fall headlong as Jess did, the moment she stepped over the sill.

"I forgot to tell you to look out for the steps," said Mrs. Pepps, somewhat tardily. "That's one thing you'll have to get used to. Some of the rooms are lower than others, and you'll find a set of steps most everywhere you look. It makes a sight of cleaning to do, because there isn't a sill in the house I can sweep clean. But Peter and I like the place. Must like it, seeing as how we've lived here thirty-two years, ever since we've been

married. That you, Barry? Peter's expecting you to help him bring in the trunks. Take 'em over to the other side of the house, upstairs. This hall is a little dark, mind you—— There, I might have known it! It was the fat one, wasn't it? I do hope he hasn't broken anything."

For Ward, for whom this had certainly been an eventful day, had vanished noisily down a surprising little back stairway that led off from the hall through which they were passing in single file.

"I'm all right," he announced, clattering up the stairs and rejoining his anxious friends, a little more flushed as to face than usual, but clearly uninjured. "I just didn't see the steps."

"I like fat boys," announced their hostess. "They're so cheerful. We turn off here."

It seemed to the girls that they had been in and out of half a dozen rooms since leaving the main hall, but now they marched through a long, unfurnished room, crossed a little entry at the end of the house, and came to a steep, narrow stairway.

"If Ward and Artie ever fall down these!" whispered Margy, with a giggle, as she began to climb.

But when they reached the second floor, a pleasant surprise was awaiting them. This wonderful old gray house may have followed no orderly

scheme of architecture, but the second floor took advantage of this absence of system to offer a series of large, square rooms, each provided with a communicating door.

"You see, there is a stairway at each end of the house," explained Mrs. Pepps. "After you come up the stairs we just climbed, you have to go through every one of these rooms to reach the staircase at the other end of the house. Father and I sleep at the other end, and I said to him that I knew young folks liked to make a noise now and then, and why not put you all off here where you wouldn't make us nervous. I thought the three girls could have these three rooms—suit yourselves as to which takes which—and across the hall there are three rooms for the boys. No use in having a house large enough for a hotel, I said to Father, if you don't spread out in it."

Polly looked at Margy and Jess looked around for a chair. They all felt slightly bewildered. Evidently, Mrs. Pepps expected them to occupy six bedrooms, and while Polly didn't know how Margy and Jess felt, the prospect of sleeping alone in a strange room in a strange house rather appalled her. The communicating doors were all open, and the children could see that the rooms were furnished with dark, massive furniture. The beds, especially, were huge, and Polly knew that

she and Jess and Margy could sleep in one without discomfort.

"No wonder Mrs. Pepps is thin if she has to do all the housework in this house," thought Polly swiftly. "I should think it would kill her."

"Gee, we can have a fine time!" Artie murmured unexpectedly. "We can make all the noise we want to, can't we?"

Then Polly, for the first time, began to suspect that all the shrewd wisdom in the Pepps family might not be confined to Peter. Mrs. Peter's eyes, surveying Artie, looked mischievous.

"All the noise you want to, as far as Father and I go," she announced. "But of course I don't know what *Carpathia* will say."

"Car—Car—" Artie struggled faintly with the name.

"*Carpathia*," said Mrs. Pepps composedly. "She's my hired girl. Been with me twenty years. She sleeps in that room at the end of the alcove and she speaks her mind pretty plain when she is disturbed. But I will say for her that she is reasonable. I couldn't keep house without *Carpathia*. She knows my ways and I know hers. What is that noise? Oh, the trunks! Now, where do you think you would rather have them put? Dear me, I know your names, but I don't know which is Polly or Margy or Jess. Father says when I see

some one I start in to talk and the important things are left to the last minute and sometimes left out altogether. Father told you to call me Aunt Jennie, didn't he? I declare, it will seem good to have some young folks call me that again. Barry, put the trunks right there in the hall—plenty of room for them and no use in using up space in the rooms. You can unpack out here, can't you, and put your things away in the closets in your rooms? Whose trunk is that?"

"Ours," Polly managed to say feebly.

"Put it on this side of the hall, Barry," commanded Mrs. Pepps. "Now hurry up with the other one."

Barry was a short and stocky young man with bright red hair that stood up stiffly. He put down the girls' trunk and hurried away for the other. Mrs. Pepps was busily opening and closing closet doors and bureau drawers and showing the Riddle Club members "how to get about" as she expressed it.

"There are seventeen rooms in this house," she told them. "I have ten bedrooms, and they're all furnished. You'll find a bed and a bureau and a couple of chairs and a washstand and bowls and pitchers in every single room. Here's the other trunk—put it over there, Barry. Now let me get your names all straight before I go down and

leave you. You'll see that I have a good memory—I won't have to ask you more than this once. Which is Polly?"

Polly blushingly identified herself and Margy and Jess were also made known to their hostess. The boys' turn came next, and then Mrs. Pepps declared herself "acquainted."

"I'm going downstairs now and let you have half an hour to yourselves to talk about me," said this remarkable woman cheerfully. "You needn't be afraid Carpathia will hear, because she is in the kitchen getting supper. I'm sure we will get along fine together and you can have a good time on a place like this. Father will just about turn the farm over to you. I'll call you as soon as supper is ready, and mind you don't fall down the stairs."

CHAPTER XVI

GETTING ACQUAINTED

LEFT to themselves, a blank silence descended on the Riddle Club. Fred tried to explain it afterward by saying that the air was filled with the echo of Mrs. Pepps' voice, but the truth was that they were all rather bewildered.

Polly was the first to recover.

"We can't use all these rooms," she declared earnestly. "Imagine six of us with a room apiece!"

"You couldn't hire me to sleep alone in there," asserted Margy, pointing through the open door of one of the bedrooms where the massive black walnut bed looked large enough for a dozen small girls.

"I don't believe she would care if we bunked in one or two rooms," Artie suggested. "Why can't you girls take one room and we three boys sleep together? If it's too hot, we can go into another room."

"Don't say 'she'—say Mrs. Pepps," corrected

Polly mechanically. "It would save a lot of work that way, too."

"Let Carpathia do it," Fred said lazily.

"You know perfectly well, Fred Williamson, that we are going to take care of our own rooms," his sister Margy scolded. "Mother was very particular about that. And I certainly don't want to have to make six beds when it comes my turn."

"We have to call her 'Aunt Jennie,'" Ward reminded them. "I wonder what Carpathia looks like?"

Polly held out her hand to Fred.

"Trunk key, please," she said. "While we are standing here talking, we might as well unpack and put our clothes away. Feel that nice breeze? I think we are going to have a fine time at Shadybrook and I'm going to say 'Aunt Jennie' the minute we go down to supper."

Fred unlocked both trunks, and unpacking and putting away familiar garments helped the children to feel more at home and allayed the longing for mother and father that all felt but none confessed. They had just cleared the last tray and were hastily brushing their hair and giving their hands a last scrub, when they heard some one calling.

"Supper!" came a cheerful hail. "Oh, up there, supper's ready!"

It was still light enough to make illumination unnecessary, and as the six children went down the steep stairs—mindful of Mrs. Pepps' caution, they went slowly—they saw Mr. Pepps standing waiting for them.

“Feel as if you could eat a little bite?” he asked hospitably. “I don’t know what it does to you, but that trip from River Bend to Hayville gives me an extra fine appetite. Mother sent me to show you the way to the dining room.”

He led the way to a room that stretched almost the length of the house on one side. You never could tell in advance where you would find a given room in Shadybrook. You simply had to learn the mystic maze the builder had followed. None of the children were prepared to go up four steps and find themselves in a long, low room with five large windows opening on a stretch of lawn and meadow, and with a fireplace at one end that was filled now with scarlet sage.

The table was long, too, and Mrs. Pepps was already seated.

“I thought Polly could sit next to me,” she said, indicating the chairs as she spoke, “Artie next to her, then Margy. That’s right. Now you sit on the other side, Fred, and Jess next to you and then Ward. Father sits at the end. I hope you’re hungry. I told Carpathia to cut plenty of bread,

because boys always like bread and butter. And I've put milk on both sides of the table, so you will be sure to have it handy—plenty of milk is a good thing for boys and girls to drink, and I always make it easy for them to get at the milk pitcher."

Polly thought how cleverly Mrs. Pepps had arranged the seating of her guests. Ward and Artie were the two youngest and they were next their sisters, a fact sure to make them more comfortable. Then, too, they were the ones who would need admonition and restraint, if any one did, and Mrs. Pepps evidently trusted to the sisters to supply the sobering influences.

As they pulled out their chairs, Polly made her effort.

"The rooms are lovely, Aunt Jennie—" she began bravely.

She meant to say that they would not need six bedrooms, but her hostess interrupted her, a beaming smile on her plain, good-humored face.

"That's my good girl," she said approvingly. "I know it takes a sight of courage to begin saying 'aunt' when you don't know me. But that's the best way in the world to get acquainted. If you said 'Mrs. Pepps,' you might say that for a couple of weeks and we'd be just as far off from being good friends as we were the first night.

Now you call me 'Aunt Jennie' and we have made a fine start. Look at Father! He's just as pleased as I am. Father, why don't you pass the nut bread? Children always like nut bread. And there is brown bread, too, and here comes Carpathia with the ham and eggs."

The Riddle Club members had been traveling since morning, a long and tiresome ride on a dusty train. The cool, sweet air of the fields through which the road from the station had wound had been a pleasant contrast, but they were still tired and hungry, even after soap and water and clean frocks and collars had contributed their freshening effect.

It was the sight of that supper table, set with piles of bread, golden squares of the richest country butter, two huge glass pitchers of creamy milk, and now, crowning touch, the enormous platter of smoking hot ham and golden and white eggs set down before Mr. Pepps, that finally rested them.

"Gee, don't they look good!" murmured Ward, almost unconsciously.

"Now there's a boy after my own heart," chuckled Mr. Pepps. "Son, you and I will get along fine. I like plenty of nourishing food, and by the looks of you, so do you. Will you have one egg or two or three?"

Jess prodded Ward violently and hissed "Say one" into his ear, but the boy's hypnotized gaze never left the platter. He did make some concession to the sisterly elbow, however, by murmuring "Two, please" instead of choosing the higher figure suggested.

"Say 'Uncle Peter,' and you get them," Mr. Pepps announced, smiling.

"Two please, Uncle Peter," said Ward mechanically.

"Father, you're forgetting we have three girls—you ought to serve the ladies first," Mrs. Pepps reminded her husband. "We're alone so much, we forget our manners, I'm afraid. Carpathia, I need a spoon. That's it. Thank you. And while you're here, you might as well serve the rice. I know some boys and girls don't care much for rice, but I beat up a little sugar and butter in mine and whip it real good and you'd think it was dessert."

Polly scarcely heard her or knew when her plate of ham and eggs was placed before her. Polly—and Margy and Jess, too—were looking at Carpathia. She had the blackest eyes they had ever seen in their lives—coal black eyes that sparkled and snapped and roved up and down the table and seemed to see at one glance wherever anything was missing or needed. For the rest, the

hired girl looked very much as Mrs. Pepps did—that is, she was tall and angular and wore a dark print dress and her hair was screwed back into a tight knot and seemed to be of no particular color.

“She doesn’t seem to say a word,” thought Polly, watching those vivid eyes as Carpathia carried a cup of tea to the farmer. “Wouldn’t it be funny if she was as still as Mrs. Pepps—Aunt Jennie, I mean—is talkative?”

When Carpathia had gone back to the kitchen Mrs. Pepps herself touched on this supposition and confirmed Polly’s thought.

“One reason I am downright glad to have some young folks in the house,” she announced, “is that I can look forward to a little conversation. Of course I am used to Carpathia and she is used to me, but there are times when it seems to me I’ll go crazy if she doesn’t talk more. She is the most silent creature I ever knew in my life—ask Father and he will tell you the same thing.”

Polly blinked a little. She was tired and she wanted her mother and she found so many new impressions confusing. Thoughts of Carpathia whirled around in her brain.

“You’re not eating a thing,” said Mrs. Pepps in concern. “Why, Polly, you haven’t hardly

touched your plate! And we have sliced peaches and a white mountain cake! Don't you usually relish your supper?"

Polly glanced up to find Carpathia at her elbow.

"All tired out," said the hired girl. "Probably has a headache. Train gives me a headache every time. I'll tuck her up on the couch in the living-room."

Polly would have been likely to protest if she had been asked to go upstairs to rest. She didn't want to be away from the others, and yet so much talk and laughter was gradually bringing on a throbbing in her head. She was very tired and she realized that Carpathia had smooth cool hands.

"Just you take a nap," said this Carpathia, pressing Polly gently down among the pillows on a shabby, friendly couch, drawn up beneath a wide screened window in the room four steps down from the dining-room and consequently shut off a little from its noise.

She went off without another word, but Polly found herself resting against the smooth linen cover of a deliciously cool pillow, instead of the gay poppy-decorations of the pillows with which the couch was otherwise heaped. There was a smooth, cool-feeling little glass bottle in her hands,

too. Carpathia must have put it there. Polly held it up to the light—lavender smelling salts.

She rested quietly, listening to the hum of talk in the dining-room. Gradually the beating in her hot head stopped, her eyelids drooped, and when the others came trooping into the room they found her sleeping peacefully.

“Let her be,” said Mr. Pepps, in a whisper. “She’s clean tuckered out. You come along with me and I’ll show you as much of Shadybrook as you can see before it’s dark.”

The three boys and Jess and Margy followed Uncle Peter outdoors and found Barry sitting under a grape arbor, whittling intently.

“What are you making?” Artie, the curious, inquired at once.

“A ship,” said Barry.

“Could I whittle?” was Artie’s next question, while the others were content to look at the smooth piece of wood which as yet bore little resemblance to a ship of any kind.

“Don’t know why not if you have a knife,” said Barry.

“He hasn’t and I don’t think he ought to have,” Margy protested. “He wouldn’t carve a ship—he’d carve his own thumb. You don’t know Artie!”

Mr. Pepps laughed and Barry smiled a little grimly.

"Well, let's go out to the barn," said the farmer. "You don't have to start your carving to-night, Artie, do you? Coming, Barry?"

Barry closed his knife with a snap and stood up.

"Might as well come, I suppose," he observed. "Thought there were six kids. One got lost already?"

"Polly is asleep—had a headache," Fred explained.

Before the words were fully out of his mouth, Margy flung herself upon him, screaming wildly: "Take it off—take it off!"

CHAPTER XVII

BINS FOR BOYS

“WAS it a mouse?” Artie asked with interest, then kept repeating: “Say, Margy, did you see a mouse?”

Margy was about as intelligible as people usually are when they are frightened. She jerked Fred’s coat and implored him to “take it off quick!”

“Caterpillar, most likely,” said Barry placidly. “There’s a good many on the arbor this year. I picked two off my coat before you came along.”

“I see it—on your sleeve, Margy—there!” Fred sent a green caterpillar spinning with a clever fillip of his fingers.

“Girls are always afraid of bugs and things,” said Ward, rather disdainfully. “I suppose they can’t help it.”

“No, they can’t help it,” Barry agreed.

“They’re not either!” snapped Jess.

“Let’s go on and see the barn, ’fore it gets too dark,” said Uncle Peter hastily.

Margy carefully skirted the arbor, and the barn was reached without further mishap. It was a large, rambling structure with a basement, and the five members of the Riddle Club who observed it instantly recognized it as an ideal place in which to play and to hold club meetings on a rainy day.

"Not much like our barn, is it, Jess?" asked Ward, with a grin.

"Thought you lived in town," said Barry, surprised. "Pete said you lived in River Bend."

"We do," explained Jess. "But we have a yard and there is a barn built at the end of the lot. Daddy let us have the room upstairs for our club-room. We have heaps of fun in it."

Barry nodded to show he understood, and while Peter Pepps led them over the barn, pointing out with a pleasant pride the great oak beams and the wide, tight floor through which not even a whisp of hay could drop, the hired man appeared to be thinking deeply.

They visited the horses in their stalls, and found that there were two besides Pork and Beans. These, the farmer gravely informed his visitors, were called Salt and Pepper, because they also were a matched team. Then, after they had seen the three sleek Jersey cows idly chewing their cud in the barnyard and had admired the view

from the wide doorway, Ward made an intensely interesting discovery. On one side of the barn were bins—a row of bins—"with things to eat in them!" Ward reported raptly.

"Now you've just had supper—you know you have," Jess scolded, anxious to uphold the Larue family's manners.

"I'm not hungry," disclaimed Ward. "But say, you ought to see what's in those bins—apples and pears and potatoes and corn and onions and apples and pears—and apples—" his voice trailed off.

"I shouldn't think you could look a pear or an apple in the face," Fred informed him severely.

The others laughed and Mr. Pepps asked what the joke was.

There was a long plank laid across two saw-horses, where apples had been sorted earlier in the day. The five children perched on this and Peter Pepps and Barry sat down comfortably on two overturned crates.

Fred briefly outlined their train trip and told how Ward had contributed to the general excitement by getting a cinder in his eye and almost getting left behind, and then by bringing in a bag of apples and pears when they had a lunch box filled with the very same kind of fruit.

"Uncle Peter," as they were finding it surpris-

ingly easy to call Mr. Pepps, laughed and Barry did, too.

"But what about this club?" asked the latter. "I belonged to a club when I was a boy. We used to hold debates."

Jess undertook to explain about the Riddle Club, and she was giving a comprehensive if brief outline of its history when Fred interrupted. Jess had reached the subject of the club's finances, and this was a matter too near Fred's heart to permit of his allowing any one else to tell of it. He was concluding with the story of the hundred dollar check they had received from Captain Mooney when a startled cry from Ward brought them all to their feet.

"Now where did that tyke go?" demanded Mr. Pepps, bewildered. "He was here a minute ago. I saw him sitting next to Artie."

Fred cupped his hands to his mouth.

"I Hey, Ward!" he shouted. "Ward, where are you?"

They all listened and heard a scrambling noise and then a clatter as something struck against metal.

"The bins!" said Barry, beginning to chuckle. "I hear his shoes scraping against the zinc lining. He must have tried to get an apple or a pear and fallen in."

There was a concerted rush for the bins that were built against the wall on the opposite side of the barn. Fred scrambled up the first bin he reached and Margy, who hated to be outdone, began valiantly to struggle up the next. Jess and Artie, seeing no foothold on the wooden face of the bins, worn smooth by time, were seized with the same kindly thought—namely, to give assistance to their comrades.

Artie rushed to help Fred and Jess dashed for Margy, with the result that where they intended to heave, they pushed wildly, and over went Fred and Margy with loud protests of surprise and rage.

It all happened so quickly that it was done before the more leisurely farmer and his helper could prevent it. When they saw what had happened they leaned up against the bins and laughed—laughed so loudly and long that Margy and Fred and Ward, in separate bins and, one of them at least, rather frightened, grew exasperated. As for Jess and Artie, they were made speechless for the time being and could only stand and stare.

“You wanted a lively time, and I think you’re going to get it,” said Barry to his employer, wiping his eyes on a bright yellow handkerchief.

“Let’s get ‘em out,” the farmer suggested, his shoulders still shaking.

"Talk about lightning!" he went on, going off into another spasm of laughter. "I never saw anything so quick—two of 'em climbing up and two of 'em pushing 'em over."

But Barry dragged a box over to the bins and stood on it so that his long arms could reach over and lift out the prisoners, one by one.

The bins were not even a quarter filled so early in the season, and as they were lined with zinc to make them rat-proof, the sides were exceedingly smooth and slippery. Even with Barry's help, it was no easy matter to scramble up, and Ward, the first rescued, was crimson from his exertions when he was finally lifted out.

"Been making cider out of my apples?" said the farmer, pretending to grumble. "A great fat boy like you comes along and falls on two layers of good apples and turns them into cider long before I'm ready to use them."

Ward grinned cheerfully.

"Oh, no, Uncle Peter," he said earnestly. "I didn't mash the apples much—though it is so dark in there I couldn't see very well. I just meant to look at them, and somehow I fell in. What happened to Margy and Fred?"

Margy and Fred by this time had been fished from the pear and corn bins respectively, and it

was plain that Margy's feelings were more injured than the pears on which she had fallen.

"Of all the silly things to do, Jess Larue!" scolded Margy. "You took my foot and gave it an awful shove! What were you trying to do, anyway?"

"Help you," said Jess so meekly that even Margy had to laugh.

"For pity's sake, are you going to stay out here all night?" exclaimed Mrs. Pepps, suddenly walking in at the doorway. "Here's Polly been awake for almost half an hour and waiting for you to come back. Her headache is all gone and it's time these children went to bed. They're probably tired after their train trip. How funny Ward looks—kind of upset. I hope nothing has happened to him. And, Margy, you have some stains on your dress. Barry and Peter, I don't suppose you know the first thing about looking after youngsters. Carpathia was saying when we were doing the dishes—"

It was impossible to say a word until Mrs. Pepps had finished, and then Mr. Pepps, a twinkle in his eye, said slowly:

"Three of 'em fell into the bins, Mother."

To Polly's surprise Mrs. Pepps' eyes widened and then she laughed. She laughed just as her

husband and Barry had done, until she had to fumble in the pocket of her skirt for her hand-kerchief.

"You might know it," she said, drying her eyes. "If they don't fall out of apple trees, they fall into apple bins. Well, I think bed is the one safe place to-night. I can't sit down to my mending till I know every last chick of them is safely in bed. Polly dear, are you sure your head is quite comfortable? Because if you have the least pain, I'll get you a cold compress."

Polly said that her head was all right. Indeed, she looked rested and her eyes were bright and clear again. Margy squeezed her hand affectionately as they walked back to the house. She didn't want anything to be the matter with Polly!

Polly had already explained to Mrs. Pepps that they would rather not use six beds.

"We'd like to try sleeping three in a bed," said Polly. "That is, if you don't mind. We girls like to be together, and while the boys won't admit it, they don't want to be separated, either. If it isn't comfortable or any one is too crowded or too warm, we can easily spread out."

"You do just as you like," Mrs. Pepps replied heartily. "I thought as long as we had the rooms to spare you might as well have them; but it doesn't make a mite of difference to me. I want

you to be happy and feel at home, and short of burning the house down over our heads, Father and I can't feel upset at anything you take it into your heads to do."

So when the Riddle Club went up the steep and narrow stairs, it had been settled that the three boys were to room together, and, across the hall, the three girls were to share one room.

"Not that it isn't elegant to have a suite," said Margy, when the good nights had been said and the doors closed. "We have two rooms to wander in and one to sleep in—that's my idea of real luxury."

"I saw a light under Carpathia's door," Jess whispered. "I don't believe she will like it if we talk very long."

"We're not going to," said Polly firmly. "Girls, I don't know what you think, but I think Aunt Jennie and Uncle Peter are perfect dears. And Carpathia lit the lamp in our room and the one for the boys—I saw her carrying them upstairs while you were out in the barn. Every one is as nice to us as can be, and the least we can do is to try not to make extra work and not to stay awake late and talk. Our mothers would say that if they were here," she added after a little pause. If the mothers and the daddies had been in River Bend the six young people would have

been perfectly happy. But Nova Scotia and the West were very far away, and in each heart was a little, unacknowledged ache.

Margy and Jess had always looked up to Polly and depended on her more than they realized. Now, as she brushed her hair and spoke so seriously, she looked very pretty and very much in earnest and Jess impulsively flung her arms around her.

“We'll be as good as——” she began, but her voice faltered.

“What is tha-t-t?” she whispered nervously, pointing to something which was being pushed under the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

COUNTRY FUN

MARGY was at the bureau and did not see Jess's pointing forefinger, but she did catch a glimpse of her face in the glass.

"For pity's sake, Jess, your eyes are like saucers!" she cried. "I wish you wouldn't look that way—you make me nervous."

"That's a note," said Polly matter-of-factly, putting down her hairbrush. "The boys, probably."

She walked over to the door and picked up the note, the other two girls crowding close to her as she opened the slip of paper.

"Carpathia snores something awful," read Polly swiftly.

For a moment they stared, then they fell on the bed in gales of laughter.

"That's Artie," said Polly, sitting up presently and wiping her eyes. "He's the only one who

writes notes. Do you know, I heard that noise once or twice, but I didn't know what it was."

"But her light was lit when we came up," Margy protested. "You don't suppose she goes to sleep and leaves a lamp burning, do you?"

Before Polly could stop her Jess had opened the door and was peering out into the hall.

"Listen!" she said, holding up a warning finger.

The girls listened intently. Loud and clear and strong and as regular as the act of breathing, they could hear deep snores. It was Carpathia, beyond a doubt, for Jess could see that her room door was open and beside it burned a small lamp.

"Does that burn all night, do you think?" asked Jess doubtfully. "Perhaps she forgot to put it out."

Margy was all for going and blowing out the light, but Polly argued against it, and they finally closed their door and went to bed, not without a good deal of giggling. If they expected to lie awake long, they were mistaken, for in less than five minutes they were all sound asleep.

Polly woke first and might have managed to get dressed before Margy and Jess opened their eyes if she had not dropped the lid of the soap dish with a sharp clatter.

"I'm not used to fussing around a washstand,"

apologized Polly, as two tousled heads rose up to survey her sleepily. "I'm glad I didn't drop the pitcher and spill the water."

With the prospect of exploring Shadybrook before them, no one wanted to stay in bed for an extra nap, so in a short time the three girls were ready to go downstairs together.

They found Fred, Artie, and Ward already gone. Their room door was wide open, and Polly insisted on stopping a few minutes to bring order out of the chaos which, with the best of intentions, seems to follow boys about. Downstairs only Carpathia was in evidence, busily setting the breakfast table.

"Mis' Pepps is out feeding the chickens," announced Carpathia briefly, as soon as she saw the girls. "The boys are out in the barn with the men."

Carpathia looked perfectly good-natured, but she did not inspire or encourage conversation. Margy was tempted to stare at her, wondering how any one could snore as loudly as she did, but Polly pulled her chum gently toward the door.

The girls spent the time till breakfast watching Mrs. Pepps' handsome white chickens and listening to that lady's remarkable flow of conversation. Margy did slip in a question or two edgewise, and

they learned that Carpathia burned a light outside her door all night and had done so ever since her childhood days.

Mrs. Pepps asserted that when she first came to live with them, the experiment had been tried of blowing out the lamp after Carpathia was safely asleep and snoring serenely. She had awakened immediately and, finding herself in darkness, had gone into violent hysterics. Since then she had been allowed to burn her lamp without protest or argument. As for the snoring, Mrs. Pepps assured them that "you get used to it—Father and I never hear her any more."

The boys came in at the call to breakfast, delighted with their first attempts at milking. Barry and Mr. Pepps declared that the cows were not as friendly as could be wished, but that in time they thought they would consent to allowing a stranger to handle them. Artie in particular had set his heart on milking "all by himself."

"Uncle Peter said I could after a while," he said, pulling his tie with one hand and patting his hair with the other, in obedience to a look from Polly.

Breakfast was a gay meal, for Mrs. Pepps could listen as well as talk, and she liked to hear brisk chat at her table. She never could "abide," she told the children, the fashion that prevailed

in many of the neighboring farmhouses, namely, that of eating a meal in perfect silence except for the sentences necessary to serve the food.

After breakfast, at Polly's gentle insistence, Mrs. Pepps agreed to let the girls take care of their room and that occupied by the boys. But aside from that, she said, there was nothing they could do to help.

"Dishes!" she laughed, when Jess suggested that so many guests would add materially to the number of dishes to be washed three times a day. "Bless you, child, Carpathia and I don't mind a few extra dishes. We like to have something to do. You run along and enjoy yourselves outdoors—summer's as good as over and fall is a tricky season; you can't tell how soon a storm will come along and make you housebound. Play outdoors all you can, and then you won't be sorry to have to go back when school opens."

All that sunny September morning the Riddle Club members roamed the farm, from one end to the other. They saw the tiny graveyard tucked away on a knoll where crumbling brown stones revealed that the bodies of people who had lived during the American Revolution were buried. They investigated the apple and pear orchards and sampled the fruit generously, Uncle Peter having declared that fruit was made to be eaten.

just as it came from the trees. They found the brook that gave the place its name, and Barry promised to take them later to the river which was a mile away, where fishing and bathing might be enjoyed.

By noon the sun was uncomfortably warm, and after doing full justice to Carpathia's apple tarts and whipped cream, a little of the energy of the morning seemed to be missing.

"It's too hot to gallop around," said Margy. "Let's do something that is quiet. I wouldn't mind taking a nap."

"You'll get too fat," Polly warned her. "We'll go out under the trees instead and have a meeting of the Riddle Club."

"Not a formal one," said Ward hastily.

Fred glanced at him significantly, but Artie asked innocently what a formal meeting was.

"There are two kinds," Ward informed him with utter gravity. "At a formal meeting you hear the minutes read and pay dues and at an informal meeting you just ask riddles and answer them."

"You might know!" said Fred bitterly. "You might know! Ward expects the Riddle Club to run on forever without collecting any dues."

This argument of dues was an ancient one, and Polly could not recall a single meeting of the

club where Fred and some other member had not wrangled over the collection of the precious dimes.

"We haven't any minutes, for Margy didn't bring the book," said Polly now. "And, Fred, we won't have any expenses while we are at Shady-brook, club expenses, I mean. So I don't see that it will hurt to have what Ward calls an informal meeting."

"It won't hurt, I suppose," Fred admitted. "But it's the principle of the thing I'm driving at. I don't want the club to get in the habit of arguing every time the subject of dues is brought up. I think it is a privilege to belong to an organization like this, and if you are willing to support a principle you ought to be willing to pay for it. My father says so. And if you really support an idea, you will be willing to contribute toward it. When men refuse to open their purses, you may know they're not deeply interested in whatever project is under discussion."

Artie stared in admiration and the other members of the club seemed dazed.

"Didn't know you were such a good speaker, Fred," applauded Mr. Pepps, stepping out of a convenient side door. "You've got all my sentiments down pat. Only I use them mostly around election time when my first cousin is running for sheriff. He's been sheriff of this county for

twenty years, and I make most of his campaign speeches."

Fred didn't know whether he was being laughed at or not, but he decided to change the subject.

"We're going to hold a meeting of the Riddle Club, Uncle Péter," he announced. "Out where it is cool—in the orchard I guess, if Ward will promise not to kill himself eating apples. Wouldn't you like to come?"

Mr. Pepps beamed. It was easy to see that being called "Uncle Peter" was more than pleasing to him.

"Why, I suppose I can come," he said slowly. "Ought to be too busy, but if a farmer can't take an hour off after dinner, when can he rest? But are you sure visitors are allowed? I wouldn't want to break in on a meeting where there was a secret conclave going on, or anything like that."

Ward and Artie hastened to reassure him.

"This is an informal meeting," they chorused. "Fred can't collect any dues. Can he, Polly?"

Polly laughed, and the rest joined in. As Mr. Marley frequently said, there were times when there was nothing to do but laugh after Artie or Ward had made a speech.

"Mother used to be a great hand for riddles when she was a girl," said the farmer suddenly. "She'd like to come, too—I suppose there'll be

chairs enough, if two visitors come to your meeting?"

"Plenty," Polly smiled. "We'll love to have you both. Shall I go and ask Aunt Jennie now?"

But at that moment Mrs. Pepps came out of the house with a basket of towels and handkerchiefs she wanted to spread out on the grass to bleach.

"You children run along," she said, when she heard of the contemplated meeting. "I'll come as soon as I get these spread out and help Carpathia peel another pan of apples—we're drying apples to-day. Father will sit down under a tree and wait for me and we'll be there before you have time to wonder what takes us so long."

The six chums went out to the orchard and made for the spot they had selected that morning as an ideal place for an outdoor meeting. Five gnarled old apple trees, the oldest in the orchard, for the majority of the trees were young and straight, formed a circle about a plot of velvety thick grass that was not dry and burned as most of the grass was after the prolonged dry spell. There was a carpet ready spread, grateful shade in abundance, and even a pleasant, if fitful, breeze in evidence the moment they ranged themselves comfortably under the trees.

"Give us an easy riddle," begged Ward lazily,

reaching back of him and picking up an apple almost automatically.

"Why should a greedy boy wear a plaid waist?" Margy demanded with so much meaning that even the slower-minded Ward was roused to mild resentment.

"I'm not greedy," he defended himself.

"That isn't any answer," Fred retorted. "Let me think! Because he needs to be less wasteful?"

Ward, made sensitive by something in Margy's stare, disclaimed this attribute also.

"I'm not wasteful," he declared.

Jess, propped up against a tree, giggled.

"Margy's asking a riddle—she isn't telling you all your faults," Jess suggested, with sisterly frankness.

"She keeps looking at me," complained Ward, with justice.

"It's an easy riddle," Margy said. "You wanted an easy riddle. Artie, can't you guess it?"

CHAPTER XIX

AN OUTDOOR MEETING

ARTIE sat as if in a trance. He had a trick of retiring into deep silence during the sessions of the Riddle Club, and he disliked to be rudely disturbed. The trouble, as Fred had once observed, was that you couldn't tell whether he was thinking up an answer to the riddle asked or wandering around after some special day-dream of his own.

"Artie?" prodded Polly.

"Well, I'm thinking! Don't you see I'm thinking?" demanded Artie. "I could do better if I had a plaid waist to look at. I don't remember any."

"Carpathia had a plaid apron on this morning —think of that," Jess offered helpfully.

"That was a check pattern, not a plaid," corrected Margy.

"There now, you see!" Artie "came to" with startling suddenness at this confirmation of his theory. "A check isn't a plaid, and if Margy hadn't said anything, I'd be thinking about a check apron and calling it a plaid."

Margy began to laugh. She looked at the serious circle of faces around her and laughed louder. The longer they stared at her, the harder she laughed and presently tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Stop looking at me!" she gasped. "Do think of something else. Oh dear, I never heard of anything so funny in my life!" and away she went into a fresh paroxysm of laughter that rendered her speechless.

"It must be us," said Fred, watching his sister in unconcealed amazement. "We are a circus and never knew it! Yep, that's it! Or else the heat has gone to her head."

Margy sat up—she had buried her face in Polly's lap—and wiped her eyes.

"Never mind me," she said shakily. "I just happened to think of something. Can't you guess the riddle?"

One by one, they gave up. By that time, as usual, Ward had forgotten what the riddle was.

"I asked you why should a greedy boy wear a plaid waist," repeated Margy.

"All right, why should he?" Ward asked curiously.

"To keep a check on his stomach," said Margy, her eyes twinkling as she saw Ward preparing to start on his third apple.

"Oh, I see!" Polly bubbled. "That's a clever riddle, Margy. Where did you get it?"

"Read it in a book," giggled Margy.

Artie was too preoccupied with a question of his own to heed this small dig.

"You said a check wasn't a plaid," he reminded Margy.

"Yes, and that's what made me laugh so," Margy explained. "I really gave you a lot of help with the answer when I said that, only no one knew it."

"How can a boy keep a check on his stomach if a plaid isn't a check?" persisted Artie.

Fred groaned and even Polly looked discouraged.

"For pity's sake, do we have to get this straightened out?" Fred said impatiently. "Every time we have a riddle, we spend three quarters of the time making the answer clear to somebody."

"Look here, Artie, a plaid is a check, but a check isn't always a plaid," explained Margy, though the explanation was far from clear. "Don't you see?"

"No, I don't," replied Artie bluntly.

"Wait a minute, I'll show him," Polly said. "Lend me your handkerchief, Fred. See, Artie, this border is a plaid and it is marked off into squares which you can call checks too, if you

like. But little tiny checks, like the blue and white ones in Carpathia's apron, aren't called plaids. They're just plain checks. Don't you understand now?"

"I understand some," admitted the cautious Artie. "I'll have to think about it more."

"Go right on and think, but don't talk about your thinks," Fred advised him. "I've got a riddle in my system that I'd like to pass around. Here goes—— Why is a specimen of fancy handwriting like a dead pig?"

Ward was relieved that they were at last off the subject of a greedy boy. Not that he considered himself greedy—and, indeed, that was not a fault of his; he always shared everything he possessed, and if he had a large appetite, he never tried to gratify it by taking the largest pieces of cake or the last bit of candy. No, Ward wasn't greedy, but he didn't like to have the question of eating brought up for any kind of discussion. So now he munched an apple happily and wondered lazily about dead pigs and fancy handwriting.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," apologized Polly. "I can't seem to make a single guess to-day. Perhaps I need a mental battle with the Conundrum Club to wake me up."

"Dead pig—ugh!" Margy shuddered.

But Jess tossed back her dark hair, her eyes sparkling.

"Pens!" she cried. "I know it has something to do with pens. Wait a minute, Fred, and perhaps I can guess it. One's done with a pen and the other—the other— Oh dear, what can I say about a dead pig and a pen?"

"You've got the answer, only you've twisted it a little in your mind," Fred told her. "The answer is 'Because they are both done with a pen.' You really guessed it, Jess."

"Yes, you really did," agreed Polly. "How clever you are, Jess. I couldn't get hold of a word that seemed to fit into any kind of an answer."

Jess smiled happily, but made no comment, and before another riddle could be asked, Mr. and Mrs. Pepps were seen through the trees coming toward them.

"Well, now, this looks as if you liked it at Shadybrook," said the farmer, smiling at the six bright faces turned to greet him. "Mother, if it's riddles that keep these young folks contented, let's you and me try a few every day. Maybe a riddle a day keeps the doctor away."

The farmer and his wife dropped down on the grass almost as lightly as the boys and girls had done. Perhaps they found it pleasant to leave the

routine work of the ordinary farm day and turn aside for a little while to something lighter.

"You've only missed two riddles," said Polly, with characteristic thoughtfulness. "We don't get along very fast, because we stop to talk and argue. Not really argue, you know, but just—just talk the answer over."

"Yes," drawled Peter Pepps, "I should give it as my opinion that where there are six of you, there might be something to be talked over. Well, have you a real, hard nut to crack? Trot it out for Mother if you have. Mother used to be the champion riddle solver in her district when she was teaching school."

"Father, you talk nonsense!" his wife exclaimed, looking at him indulgently over her glasses. "I used to be fairly good at solving riddles, but that was because I read dozens of them and memorized the answers. They used to say I was as handy as a riddle book to have around. But of course in my day we didn't have a lot of fancy riddles, and there was always some kind of clew you could find, if you were careful enough."

She stopped and looked expectantly at Polly.

"I know a riddle—it's rather old, but perhaps no one has heard it," said Polly. "Why is a healthy boy like the United States?"

"Huh, that's easy," Artie cried with more haste than politeness. "He eats the crops."

It was impossible not to laugh as poor Ward's face crimsoned.

"I've had only five," he said, trying to cover the small heap of apple cores with his foot.

"Look here, son, you eat all the apples you can hold," Peter Pepps encouraged him. "If there is one thing I like to see, it is a boy with a good hearty appetite. You look as though you liked to eat, and Shadybrook is the place for you. Apples never killed a boy yet 'less he ate 'em green, and this time of year a green apple would be a curiosity."

"But wasn't that the right answer?" asked Artie.

"It was not," Polly said crisply. "Now let Aunt Jennie try to guess."

"Well, I should say a healthy boy was like the United States because he is up and hustling," declared Mrs. Pepps. "The Americans are strong for rush and bustle, you know."

Polly shook her head.

"You tell us, Polly," urged Mr. Pepps. "Ought to take pity on us at first, seeing as how we are out of practice. That is, if none of these other youngsters can guess."

No one could guess, and Polly had to tell them the answer.

"A healthy boy is like the United States," said she, smiling, "because he possesses a good constitution."

"Well, who would have thought of that!" the farmer exclaimed. "Riddles are like that—so easy when you know the right answer. Mother, I'm surprised you didn't guess that, after all."

"Suppose we try a riddle on them," suggested Mrs. Pepps. "What was that one I used to tell so much when we were popping corn winter nights? I remember—I haven't thought of it for years. 'What is that without legs which raps on the door?' See if you youngsters can guess that."

"Spooks?" ventured Fred.

"A wooden-legged man?" Ward submitted.

Polly thought it might be the branches of a tree in the wind, and Jess decided that if some one threw a handful of pebbles against the door, that would be the explanation.

"All wrong," chuckled Mr. Pepps, who of course knew the answer. "What's the matter with you, Artie? We haven't any word from you."

Artie roused himself from one of his famous silences. Polly glanced at him a trifle apprehen-

sively. One never knew what Artie might say after a spell of meditation.

"You could rig up something," said Artie solemnly, "with a string and a piece of iron and a handle to pull it. I'll bet you I could make one."

"Now there," Mrs. Pepps told the surprised Riddle Club, "is what I call a really bright child. I shouldn't wonder if he was a scientist or an inventor some day. Artie, you've solved the riddle."

CHAPTER XX

OLD TIMERS TO GUESS

ARTIE was as much surprised as any of the others at this lavish praise. His mind had been busy with his "invention," and for the moment he had forgotten that he was supposed to be solving a riddle.

"Did he solve it?" asked Ward incredulously.

"I don't see that he said *anything*," the bewildered Fred protested.

Mrs. Pepps smiled delightedly.

"Well, maybe he didn't solve the riddle in as many words," she admitted. "But he certainly had the idea. I never saw a child with a better grasp of ideas. And, after all, that is what counts. Any one can speak a word or two, like a parrot, but it takes a good mind to ferret out the meat of a question. Now, Artie, they don't seem to think you've solved my riddle, but I know you have. We'll show them. If you 'rig up something' with the string and the piece of iron you spoke of, what will you have?"

"Something to rap on the door," Artie answered promptly.

"And what would you call it?"

"I don't know," admitted Artie.

Mrs. Pepps looked disappointed and her husband laughed.

"Think, Artie," urged the former. "We have one on our front door—you saw it when you came in."

But this was too much for the listening circle.

"Door knocker!" they shouted in unison.

"Isn't that funny?" said Fred. "Here we were working our heads off and couldn't think of that, and Artie invented a door knocker in his mind and couldn't think what to call it."

"I like that kind of a riddle," Jess declared.
"Tell us some more, Aunt Jennie."

"Let me think," said that lady. "It's been years since I've had anything to do with riddles."

"Well, I ought to be going back to work," Peter Pepps murmured.

But he waited, too. There is something fascinating about riddles, and a few more minutes wouldn't matter.

"Here's one I couldn't guess at a party," said Mrs. Pepps. "I remember there were a dozen of us and we told riddles while we waited for the molasses candy to cook. Now don't be impatient

—let me get it straight in my mind. Um—I don't know as it is fair to ask you that one, because perhaps you've never seen the answer."

She gazed at them meditatively. The Riddle Club felt their curiosity mounting higher. It surely was tantalizing to be told that they had not seen the answer.

"I never saw a boa constrictor," remarked Artie conversationally.

Mrs. Pepps laughed heartily.

"No more have I," she returned. "No, that isn't the answer. I suppose I might as well tell you. You may have seen it in pictures, or you may guess it, anyway. I know that children nowadays guess at things they've never seen. Besides, there are the movies—children go to the movies so much that there are few things, old or new, they haven't seen in the pictures. Yes, I think, after all, I'll tell you the old riddle. 'What kind of a broom do you use to get a drink with?' There—that is something to think about, isn't it?"

Judging from the expressive faces before her, it was. Six pairs of eyes stared helplessly.

"You can't get a drink with a broom," Margy stated positively.

"Oh, yes, you can—in a riddle," insisted Polly,

just as certainly. "I wish I could think of some other name for broom," she added.

Mr. Pepps shook his head as a sign that she was on the wrong track.

"Better think about water," he suggested.

"Father!" his wife warned him. "Don't you spoil the fun of guessing. This is a real old-time riddle, and I'd like to have the children guess it without a mite of help."

Fred was hunched up "like a pretzel" Margy said, and thinking so furiously that a little wrinkle made a crease between his eyes.

"Water—water—water," said Jess very rapidly.

"Broom—broom—broom," Artie chattered.

Polly and Fred and Ward said nothing at all, but stared into space.

"What happens if they don't solve it?" asked Mr. Pepps, his eye twinkling.

But every one said "Sh!" so he started in to make a little collection of twigs and pebbles on top of a round flat stone he found near his elbow.

Suddenly Fred gave a yell—an ear-splitting sound that reminded one of houses on fire, Indians in the offing, dynamite about to explode. In other words, he succeeded in making every one jump. Artie was so startled that he knocked his head smartly against a tree.

"I've got it! I've got it!" shouted Fred. "I've got it!"

"Christopher Columbus, you've got something all right," Mr. Pepps said, surveying the excited lad with a calm in marked contrast to Fred's demeanor. "I should say you've solved Mother's riddle."

"Did you, Fred?" urged Artie, forgetting to rub his head. "Say, Fred, did you solve the riddle?"

"I guess so—I don't see why not—isn't it a broom?" Fred babbled incoherently.

"Somebody hold on to him or he'll boil over," drawled Ward. "I don't see any sense in getting so excited over a riddle."

"That's because you didn't guess it," said Jess shrewdly.

But Fred was too full of his accomplishment to waste time listening to any good-natured bickering.

"You remember the hotel where Dad took us for dinner?" he demanded of his chums. "The place where we had chicken and the old man talked about the 'ele-ments'? There was a well there, don't you remember?"

"This is a broom," Artie said tenaciously.

"You'll see in a minute," said Fred. "There was a well and it had an old well-sweep. And

that's the answer—that's the kind of broom you use to get a drink with."

"A—a well-sweep?" Margy repeated.

"Sure, a well-sweep! You use a broom to sweep well and a well-sweep to get a drink with! Isn't that the answer, Aunt Jennie?"

"It certainly is," affirmed Mrs. Pepps. "I must say, you children are good at guessing riddles. That stumped the whole party forty years ago. And I wasn't sure it was a fair riddle to ask you, because I couldn't be sure you had ever seen a well-sweep. My goodness, how long have I been out here? There's Carpathia beating on the pan—I told her to call me as soon as she had the spices tied up for the pears.

"Father, are you coming? I thought you were going over to town this afternoon to get some more of those wire nails. Why don't you take the children with you? They can't guess riddles all the time, and it's cooler now than it was at noon."

So the Riddle Club was adjourned in favor of the trip to Hayville, and, in spite of the choking dust, they thoroughly enjoyed the drive. Then, too, there were ice-cream cones to be had at the general store, and on the way home they tried to see if they could sing loud enough to make themselves heard above the rattle of the wagon. This was a highly satisfying performance to those tak-

ing part, and Peter Pepps seemed to enjoy the noise as much as any one.

The days that followed were wholly delightful. The weather grew cooler, though the longed-for rain did not come. The house and barn, the length of the little brook, and every inch of the fields at Shadybrook were thoroughly explored by the active members of the Riddle Club, who daily found something new and interesting to hold their attention.

To be sure, there were times when one longed for father and mother. But the days were so full that there was little time for brooding and after the busy days in the open the girls and boys fell asleep almost as soon as they got into bed at night.

When it seemed to them that they had been everywhere and done everything, Mrs. Pepps announced that she thought a cooking class would amuse the girls.

"Father and Barry have set their hearts on taking the boys to the river," said the farmer's wife. "And they've promised to bring us home a mess of fish for supper. Now whether they will or not, I've promised peach tarts for dessert, and my experience has been that it's safer to promise dessert than fresh fish. Anyway, Polly was saying the other day that she'd like to know how to

make the kind of tarts *Carpathia* does, and what one learns the others might as well. Dear knows, the kitchen is large enough for a dozen cooks! It's a nice cool morning, and there won't be any better time."

The three girls had been a trifle envious of the plan for fishing which excluded them, though, as Polly had remarked, they couldn't expect to do always just whatever the boys did. Now, however, the prospect of learning to cook in the comfortable farm kitchen was fully as attractive as a day at the river. In fact Margy, who detested the mention of worms or bait, was much better pleased.

"There's the postman! I'll go get the mail!" Polly offered, as the rickety light wagon of the rural mail carrier drew up at the tin mail box, posted several yards from the house. "It's nice he came before the boys got off. Perhaps Fred's magazine has come."

But there was something better than the anticipated magazine in the tin box this morning. Polly came running back to the house, her face aglow, waving two letters in her hand.

"*Nova Scotia!*" she called. "They're from *Nova Scotia!* Look at the funny postage stamps. Where's Jess? Jess, here are letters from the folks. Tell everybody."

Though the team was harnessed and the fishermen anxious to start on their expedition, the letters were conceded to be vastly more important. Mrs. Marley's letter was addressed to Polly, and she read most of it aloud as the others stood about her.

Mrs. Marley wrote to say that though they had encountered a severe storm on the water, the steamer had made Halifax on time and that the weather was most beautiful there.

"We are starting inland this morning," the letter said, "for a quaint little lumber town, called Chassy. I believe it is in the heart of the forest and primitive in every way. We are enjoying every moment of the trip. All are well, and if we find any one in Chassy with a riddle to tell, we'll learn it by heart and bring it home to you."

Then followed several loving messages for Artie and some admonitions for both Polly and Artie.

"They don't know we are at Shadybrook," said Polly, folding up the letter. "Mrs. Williamson wrote Mother, but of course this letter was mailed before any letters from River Bend could reach Nova Scotia. Daddy said, when they left, that they might not get any mail till they got back to Halifax. I suppose letters can't go chasing

around to all the little towns like Chassy, not in time to catch up with them."

The letter from Mrs. Larue to Jess and Ward had nothing in the way of news to add.

The letters from the travelers seemed to brighten the already bright day, and the boys departed whistling in chorus with Barry, who drove, and Peter Pepps who acted, so he said, as "ballast."

"And I do believe I'll roll out a few cookies while I'm about it," said Mrs. Pepps, leading the way to her spotless kitchen. "Carpathia put them up a tremendous lunch, and just about used my last cookie."

CHAPTER XXI

COOKS MUST LEARN

THE silent Carpathia welcomed the new cooks with a wordless smile and went on peeling peaches. She was seated next to one of the windows, a large yellow bowl on the table beside her. It was already half full of luscious yellow peaches, stoned and halved.

Mrs. Pepps produced aprons for the three girls, and they set to work, Margy to slice the peaches; Jess to measure the sugar, set out the mixing board, the flour, and other things wanted; while Polly was initiated into the mysteries of pastry-making.

"You have a light hand; I've noticed it," said their hostess. "And if there is one thing good crust needs, it is a light hand. Some people tackle pastry crust as though they were mixing concrete. Here's a knife, Polly—cut in the shortening. That's right. And the water must be ice-cold. Pour in a little more. Now turn it out. Fine! Now the rolling pin. Carpathia, I just want you should watch this child mix pie crust. Pans,

please, Jess. That's right—line them and trim off one side a little. Peaches, Margy—um, they're beautifully done. Lay them in layers. Sugar, Jess. Now fold over the top, Polly, and pinch the edges together. Make two slits across for the juice to run out. Well, you needn't tell me there is a thing the matter with those tarts."

Mrs. Pepps was the only one who talked, for Carpathia peeled steadily and the girls were too fascinated with their work to try any conversation. At Mrs. Pepps' suggestion, they filled several open-work tarts, lining small pans with the pastry, laying the sliced peaches in neat rows, and then a top lattice-work of pie crust strips that allowed the golden peaches to show through.

"The boys may catch fish, though I doubt it, for it takes patience to fish the Ralston River, and I miss my guess or they'll go swimming instead," said Mrs. Pepps, as she watched Polly slip the tarts into the oven dexterously. "But one thing is certain, we won't lack dessert to-night. And there's plenty of heavy cream we can whip. I think peach tarts and whipped cream is a very nice dessert."

Three young cooks felt their mouths watering in anticipation. "A very nice dessert" but feebly described what they thought of peach tarts and

whipped cream. They knew the kind of whipped cream served at Shadybrook farm—thick and delicately flavored with a dash of almond and standing up in the old-fashioned silver bowl like “the white cliffs of England,” as Artie had once awed the table by commenting.

“You never saw the white cliffs of England,” Fred had felt constrained to reprove his chum.

Artie’s reply had been expected by every one present, but they laughed spontaneously when he piped up:

“I read about them in a book.”

Mrs. Pepps rolled out her cookie dough as though she were cutting out a new dress, twitching the coffee-colored, smooth mass here and pulling it out there. The way she cut the sheet with the cookie cutter and slapped the cookies into a shallow pan, then into the oven, fascinated the watchers.

“Couldn’t we make cookies, too?” asked Margy, thirsting for new worlds to conquer.

“I suppose you could,” Mrs. Pepps agreed promptly. “Sugar cookies are easy to make. Where you going, Carpathia? Out to turn the apples? All right. Yes, we can manage. I’ll set the girls going and then I’ll call up Amanda Haynes and ask her if she’s had that catsup recipe from her sister yet.”

Mrs. Pepps was washing her mixing board and rolling pin in cold water, and Jess, who liked to know the reasons for things, asked why she didn't use hot.

"Because it cooks the dough and makes it twice as hard to get off," explained Mrs. Pepps. "Cold water soaks the flour loose and you don't have to scrape—you know to scrape a mixing board or a rolling pin ruins them, makes them rough. Now you begin and get out the things you'll need for sugar cookies and I'll tell you just what to do."

Under her directions they brought out more sugar and eggs. The beautifully browned molasses cookies were taken from the oven, filling the air with a fragrance that Margy privately thought must reach the Ralston River and bring the boys back on the run. Most of the tarts were pronounced done. Just as Mrs. Pepps was about to initiate Margy into the lore of cookie baking, four short rings and a long one proclaimed that some one in the Pepps family was wanted at the telephone.

"If that is Amanda Haynes, she'll take a full half hour," said Mrs. Pepps, in perfect sincerity. "I can't get away from her. I'll tell you what you do: Take that cookbook there on the shelf—the one bound in white oilcloth—and find the recipe for sugar cookies. I think it is on page

fifty-six. You can't make a mistake if you follow the directions. Jess, you read it aloud to the other two. I'll be back as soon as I can. Be sure you grease your pans well, and as soon as the cookies are a light brown on top, take them out. If the oven heat seems to die down, put on four corncobs, but not more at one time. And if you can't understand what the cookbook says, come out in the hall to ask me, and I'll tell you."

She hurried away to still the shrill clamor of the telephone bell, and Margy and Polly and Jess, feeling several inches taller, took upon themselves the responsibility of making sugar cookies. Jess took down the fat cookbook and found the recipe, as designated. Carpathia was out in the shed, turning the racks of apples which were placed in the sun to dry. They were protected from flies by nets and had to be carefully turned once a day.

"Two cups of sugar, creamed with half a cup of shortening—that means lard or butter, Mrs. Pepps said," read Jess. "Say, Polly, what kind of a place do you suppose Chassy is?"

"Why, I don't know—a little bit of a place, I imagine," Polly answered, watching Margy begin to cream the butter and sugar.

Jess sat in Carpathia's place by the window, and her thin brown face was turned toward the gentle breeze that fluttered through the screen.

"I'd like to see a lumber town," she said wistfully. "Maybe there are mountains around it and all kinds of tall trees. And little logging camp trains just as you see in pictures. Perhaps Mother will send us some post cards. When I grow up—"

"Hey, Jess, what do I do next?" Margy demanded. "I've got this butter and sugar as smooth as glass."

Jess turned back to her book.

"I mean to travel around the world when I grow up," she said as one speaking of a familiar dream. "'Take ten eggs and beat the yolks and whites separately.'"

"Gracious! I should call these cookies expensive," commented Margy. "Mrs. Pepps only used two for hers. Well come on, Polly, I can't beat ten eggs without help. Want to do the whites or the yellows?"

Polly knew that Margy liked to whip egg whites because they stood up so beautifully. She complained that beating the "yellow" didn't leave you with anything to show. They separated ten eggs and Polly labored industriously with a silver fork till her bowl held a creamy golden mass. Margy plied the egg beater till apparently a gallon of froth filled the deep mixing bowl.

"All right—go ahead, Jess," said Polly.

Jess had been reading the index of the book and now she turned back with a guilty start.

"One cup of cornstarch and four cups of milk," she directed glibly.

Margy measured and mixed and looked at the result dubiously.

"It's awfully thin," she complained.

"Well, fold in the egg whites next," Jess told her. "No, the egg yolks first and then the whites. Eggs always makes things thicker—I've heard Mother say so."

Jess didn't know that eggs can not thicken a mixture until cooked with it, but Margy accepted her advice in good faith and into the bowl went the ten eggs, "well beaten" as the cook book directed.

"Don't I need any flour?" asked Margy, wondering if there would be any room left in her bowl for mixing. It was nearly full now.

"One cup of flour and a teaspoon of baking powder," read Jess. "Flavor to taste."

"What's that?" Polly asked, as Margy crimson-faced stirred one cup of flour into her mixture that remained obstinately thin and inclined to splash.

"I think it means as much as you like," said Margy, pausing.

"Or what you like," said Jess.

"Well, let's see what there is," suggested Polly.

In the pantry they found lemon, almond, vanilla, and orange extract and a bottle of oil of peppermint. There was a spice box, too, which contained more little boxes. According to the labels these held cloves and powdered cinnamon and nutmeg, aniseed, bitter aloes, and ginger.

"Don't put in spices," begged Polly. "That makes things dark and sugar cookies ought to be white. Why don't you flavor them with vanilla?"

"Everybody uses vanilla," Margy objected. "I'd rather use orange. How much do you suppose 'taste' is?"

"Enough to make it taste," said Polly. "You'd better start with a teaspoon and if that doesn't make the stuff taste of orange, add more gradually."

This sounded sensible, but the drawback was that Margy flatly refused to do any tasting.

"It's too eggy," she protested. "I can't stand raw eggs; you taste it, Polly."

Polly consented, and after two tablespoons of the orange extract had been added to the mixture in the bowl, she declared that it "tasted enough."

"But it's so thin," complained Margy. "You can't roll out cookies when the stuff is as thin as that. Jess, go and ask Mrs. Pepps what to do

when the cookie batter is too thin to roll out and cut."

Jess sped away to the hall. Mrs. Pepps and Amanda Haynes were still engaged in exchanging the news of the day, but Mrs. Pepps put her hand over the mouthpiece for a moment to listen to Jess.

"Needs more flour," was her verdict. "Tell Margy to add enough flour to make a dough stiff enough to turn out on the mixing board. You often have to add from a half to a cup more flour than the recipe calls for."

Back went Jess and reported.

"I knew it needed more flour, but I was following the recipe," said Margy. "I think this will take more than an extra cup of flour, though."

As a matter of fact it did. It took half a dozen cups to make a stiff dough and the young cook's arms threatened to "break off," according to her own statement, before she had the sticky mass turned out on the board.

She was gazing at it a little blankly when Mrs. Pepps came in. One look at the mountain of dough and the three anxious faces, and the farmer's wife knew something had gone wrong.

"Margy dear!" she cried. "What in the world! Why, you must be making cookies to last



"I NEVER SAW SO MUCH DOUGH!"

The Riddle Club at Shadybrook.

till Christmas time. I never saw so much dough!
Did you double the recipe?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Jennie!" said Margy, sure that whatever she had done, it wasn't to double the recipe. "There does seem to be a lot of dough, but I think that is because it took so much flour to thicken the ten eggs."

Mrs. Pepps' eyes flew to her egg pan, plainly depleted.

"Good gracious, my dear child!" she ejaculated. "I never heard of making cookies with ten eggs! Where did you get that idea?"

"In the cookbook," said Jess. "I read it to her."

Mrs. Pepps crossed the kitchen and picked up the book from the table. Swiftly she read down one page, turned a few leaves, and sat down in Carpathia's chair and looked at the girls, who stared at her solemnly.

"You haven't been making cookies," she told them, her lips twitching as though she wanted to laugh. "You've been stirring up a wedding cake."

CHAPTER XXII

FRED GOES TO TOWN

POLLY looked horrified, Margy utterly bewildered, and Jess stunned.

"Wed-wedding cake!" Polly finally managed to murmur faintly.

"Wedding cake!" affirmed Mrs. Pepps. "Here's the recipe—ten eggs, one cup of butter—"

"Oh, we didn't use that much butter," Margy protested, finding her voice. "Did we, Jess?"

"No-o," said Jess, much perplexed. "But, Aunt Jennie, how *can* it be wedding cake when I was reading sugar cookies?"

Mrs. Pepps had been looking at the array of packages on the table.

"Did you use cornstarch? What for?" she asked.

The three cooks had very pink cheeks by this time. They could not explain the cornstarch, except that Jess had read "one cup of cornstarch and four cups of milk."

"Well, strange as it may seem, I do believe Jess has completely mixed up everything," said Mrs. Pepps, poking the dough with a finger tip as though she didn't know what consistency to expect. "I think the breeze fluttered the leaves of the book when she wasn't looking, and she has just read measurements wherever her eyes happened to rest on them. That cornstarch and milk sounds like snow pudding to me—though I never heard of using a cup of cornstarch. And when I came in the book was certainly open at wedding cake. You see, one half of this cookbook is desserts, and unless you keep your place, you're apt to wander without much trouble from cake to pie and from pie to pudding. I do believe Jess has done something like that. Never mind, we'll bake this, and if it turns out we can't eat it, Carpathia can soak it in milk for the barn cats. They'll eat anything."

Poor Jess was so mortified that she cried. But Mrs. Pepps laughed, and before the fishing party had returned had succeeded in persuading her that all cooks are likely to make mistakes when they first attempt to bake.

"And we were just as stupid as you were," said Margy, who was comforting at the same time she was frank. "If we had had more experience in cooking, we would have known that you don't use

ten eggs in cookies. We won't tell the boys and then they can't laugh at us."

The cookies and the tarts were arranged on the kitchen table when the boys came back to supper, but no mention was made of the mass of dough that Carpathia discreetly hid under one of the wash benches in the shed until she should have time to take it out to the barn and feed it to the cats, whose digestive apparatus, inured to rats, was supposed to be able to assimilate anything. The girls had hoped their experiment would turn out edible, but Mrs. Pepps said, when she heard that only one teaspoon of baking powder had been put in, she gave up hope.

Carpathia had been sworn to secrecy, and the boys merely stared at her when she gave a snort and remarked that "it never rains but it pours" upon receiving the news that no fish had been caught.

"We had a pile of fun, though," Fred reported. "We fished all the morning and didn't get a bite. Then, after lunch—that was some lunch, Carpathia—we went swimming. Willows all along the river, too pretty for anything. You'd like it, Polly."

"Gee, these are good tarts," said Artie later when the dessert was served. "I hope you don't forget how to make 'em when we go home."

"No, you'd better write it down," Ward advised anxiously. "I think dessert is the best part of dinner and supper."

"It is when made by such good cooks as these three young ladies," declared Mr. Pepps, beaming upon the young visitors. He had been told that the girls had made the tarts, but no one had mentioned "sugar cookies" to him.

"Let's write to the folks," suggested Fred, after supper was over. "That's a funny place where they're going, isn't it? Could we find it on the map, do you suppose?"

Peter Pepps had an atlas, but the maps were old and small. There was no mention of Chassy and no description, though there was half a page devoted to Nova Scotia. Artie pointed out to the Williamsons, however, about where Chassy ought to be, for of course the Marleys and the Larues had studied the map before their fathers and mothers had left for Nova Scotia. The children read all there was to read, then wrote a round robin letter that was a curious compound of six individual and distinct characters, likes and dislikes, and heart-warming love.

It was some three or four days later that Fred drove into town with Barry, to visit the blacksmith, get some groceries and see if the new corn sheller was in the express office.

Fred was a favorite with Barry, and he was whittling a model of a ship under his careful direction. Artie had abandoned his artistic inclinations after he discovered that he couldn't read and whittle at the same time. He said he preferred to improve his mind.

But Fred had developed a really clever knack for using a knife and was interested in the different kinds of wood and their grains.

"I'll carve a model of a ship and we can have it for the clubroom," said Fred, and the Riddle Club highly approved of this plan.

"We'll leave Salt and Pepper to get their hind shoes and go get the groceries and call at the express office," outlined Barry, as they jogged slowly toward Hayville.

The dust was still thick and white, for there had been no heavy rain. It was too uncomfortable to try to travel quickly, and the other teams they met were proceeding at a slow walk, too.

"I want to get a hair cut," said Barry, as they finally came in sight of the town. "Mind waiting for me, Fred?"

"Of course not," Fred replied quickly. "But I wish you'd tell me where to get a newspaper. Uncle Peter takes the weekly *Herald*, but I feel kind of funny never seeing a daily paper. Isn't there a paper store somewhere around here?"

"Opposite the express office. I'll show you," Barry promised. "You can stay there and read while I'm in the barber shop if you have a mind to. You never can tell how long we'll be held up at the blacksmith shop—depends on how many horses are ahead of us."

They pulled up at the blacksmith shop, a rickety building built on the edge of the hamlet. The smith came to the door and greeted Barry cordially. He seemed glad of an excuse to breathe the cooler air and mopped his face roughly with an enormous, grimy handkerchief.

"Two ahead of you," he said in response to a question from Barry. "Won't be so long, though —maybe three-quarters of an hour. Where you going?"

Barry told him, and the man went back to pounding on his anvil while Fred walked with Barry down the one street on which the stores were built. The express office was opposite the station, and inquiry there revealed that the corn sheller had not yet arrived.

"There's Lem Gaines' store, over there," said Barry, pointing diagonally across from the express office. "He keeps papers and books and magazines and candy and such truck. You can come back there in a few minutes. Like you to see the grocery store."

Fred knew that Barry liked to have some one go with him, and he had guessed one of the reasons from some teasing remark Peter Pepps had made as they drove away from the farm.

"Don't let that black-eyed girl in Dovers' make you forget the varnish for the kitchen chairs, Barry," the farmer had called after them.

Barry's face had turned a bright red, and even Fred had noticed it.

Now, in Dovers', a store which tried to keep everything a farmer could possibly need at any season of the year, and generally succeeded, Fred found himself looking for the "black-eyed girl." He saw her almost as soon as they were inside the door—a very young, very pretty, perfectly self-possessed young woman, who bore down upon Barry and asked him crisply what she could do for him.

Barry stuttered and stammered and blushed and generally acted as though bereft of his senses. Fred felt sorry for him, and it seemed to him that the girl liked to see him confused.

"You've got a list," said Fred to Barry. "Give her that."

Mechanically Barry reached into his coat pocket and produced the list. The girl took it and Fred nudged Barry.

"Why don't you get your hair cut while she's getting the stuff together?" he suggested.

"Well, I suppose I could," mumbled Barry.

But once outside he wiped his face and looked at Fred gratefully.

"That was a good thought you had," said Barry. "A first-class idea. Now, when it's time to go perhaps I can get some one to bring out our stuff with his own—there's 'most always some one hanging around the sheds I know—and I won't have to go into the store again."

"I'll get it for you," Fred offered. "That girl doesn't scare me."

"She doesn't scare me, either," said Barry firmly. "Not a mite. Only she's so quick and sharp she gets me twisted-like; then she laughs and all the half-wits in the place tell me how stupid I am."

Barry, his thanks still fervent, went to the barber's for a much needed hair-cut and Fred walked on to the paper store. He found that there was only one copy of that day's paper to be had, published in a city with which he was not at all familiar. But he took it and stuffed it into his pocket and bought a couple of magazines for the girls. Margy had complained that she had nothing to read, but Polly was absorbed in a huge

pile of old magazines she had found in the garret. They were saved from the first year of Mrs. Pepps' housekeeping, and if Polly had spent an eight-hour day reading them, she could not hope to finish them by the time she went back to River Bend. The magazines interested Jess, too, though she preferred to be out-of-doors, and as for Artie, whenever he disappeared the others knew he was up in the attic "reading a book." One trunk was filled with old books that had been banished from the walnut bookcase downstairs as being "out of date."

"I'd rather crochet," was Margy's invariable response when Polly asked her to go up in the attic and look at the magazines.

"I don't see any sense in looking at fashions that are a hundred years old," said Margy on another occasion. "I can get all the history I want in school."

Fred strolled over to the barber shop, when his purchases were complete, and found Barry just coming out.

"You going to get the stuff from the store?" the latter hinted anxiously.

"I'll bring it right around to the blacksmith shop," said Fred.

He went to the store, asked for the bundle of groceries, and almost grinned when a clerk in a

white coat handed it to him. The girl was nowhere in sight.

"Barry's like the worry cow," thought Fred, carefully keeping on the shady side of the street where there was also less dust. "He worries before he is hurt."

At the blacksmith shop Fred found Salt and Pepper already harnessed to the wagon and two men helping Barry with the last buckles.

"Fred, this is Adam Holt and Ebner Morris," said Barry, indicating each with a wave of his hand. "They're going part way with us—as far as the Winter farm."

There was a blanket doubled in the back of the wagon, and Fred elected to sit on this. As he thought, the three men liked to talk together and, ranged on the board seat, their tongues wagged sociably. Fred pulled the paper from his pocket and began to glance over it.

He wasn't much interested in the general news—politics and world affairs and one or two stories of local interest to the city where the paper was printed. But when he turned the page something caught his eye. He read the headlines hurriedly, then the half dozen paragraphs. He glanced up at Barry, in animated conversation with Mr. Holt. Then Fred folded the paper and put it back in his pocket.

But after the two men had jumped down at the Winter farm gate and Fred had moved up to the vacant place beside Barry, he was so silent that Barry was sure he had a headache.

"A little touch of the sun—better lie down when we get back," he advised him.

"I'm all right," Fred declared shortly, and as soon as they reached Shadybrook he hurried off to the house.

"Where's Margy?" he demanded of Artie, who was sunning himself on the doorstep like an especially pleasant little lizard.

CHAPTER XXIII

A HEAVY SECRET

“MARGY’s gone over to the next farm,” said Artie indifferently.

“Where’s everybody else?” Fred asked him.

“They’ve gone, too.”

“Well, can’t you say anything?” prodded Fred.
“What made them go?”

“Oh! Why, there’s a new calf or something—no, I guess it is a colt,” Artie answered amiably enough.

Fred rubbed his forehead fretfully.

“Want to go?” suggested Artie. “I didn’t, but I will if you want to. Ward only went because he likes the buttermilk and Carpathia told him Mrs. Meadows is churning to-day. Is that a newspaper? Let me read it, will you, Fred?”

Fred clutched the paper in his pocket as though he thought Artie might tear it from him.

“You leave that be—that stays right where it is,” he said so savagely that Artie stared.

“I mean it,” went on Fred. “Here’s a couple

of magazines—you can look 'em over. I wish I knew how long Margy will be gone."

"Where you going?" Artie inquired, closing his inevitable book and rising, to signify that he was willing to follow whither Fred led.

"I'm going out to the barn and I don't need any company," said Fred. "Things are coming to a pretty pass if a fellow can't have a few minutes to himself around here. You read your book and leave me alone and we'll get on all right. Otherwise there is likely to be a disagreement and some one will get punched."

Artie was so astonished—for Fred often pretended to be provoked but very seldom was actually put out—that he sat down again and opened his book, without, however, seeing a word on the page.

"Well, you needn't be such a crab about it," he said, but his tone was so ridiculously meek that at another time Fred would have laughed.

Now he walked away rapidly to the barn. He purposely avoided Barry, who was cheerfully whistling as he put away the harness, and climbed the ladder to the hayloft. Once in the seclusion afforded by the billows of hay, Fred spread out his newspaper and, disregarding the heat which made the perspiration pour down his face, read the article that interested him through again.

"Gee!" he whispered as he finished. "I wish I knew what to do. I wonder if I ought to tell them? Polly wouldn't get excited or anything, but she would lie awake nights and worry. She worried when we had that storm, Margy says, before we left River Bend."

Fred, flat on the hay, chin cupped in his hand, was so serious that if any of his chums had seen him at that moment they would have known he was troubled about something.

"I wish I knew what to do!" he whispered. "I don't see how folks know what to do when something happens that never happened before."

"Oh-h, Fred!" called a gay, clear voice. "Fred! Where are you, Freddie?"

Ordinarily that was a rank insult—Fred permitted no one to call him "Freddie." But now he did not seem to notice it. Instead he leaned over the edge of the haymow and peered down.

"Pst, Margy!" he said in a loud whisper.

"Well, for goodness' sake!" Margy looked at him in a manner not exactly approving.

"What are you doing up there?" she inquired significantly. "Artie told me you were a perfect crab and as cross as two sticks. Why didn't you come over to see the new colt? It's the cunningest thing you ever saw and it would make you laugh to see it wabble when it walks."

"Never you mind new colts," said Fred. "I've got more on my mind than colts. Are you alone? Where are the others?"

"I left them watching the colt," said Margy. "Why? I came back to see if you were home yet and ask you to come over. But I'm going right back if you are going to be so cranky."

"Hey, don't go away," Fred implored in genuine alarm. "Come on up, Margy—I have something to show you."

Margy was too curious to sweep out of the barn with her nose in the air—as she rather wished to do—so she mounted the ladder, but her expression plainly said that she knew she was being tricked.

"Look!" said Fred, thrusting the paper into her hands and pointing to certain black headlines.

"Oh!" Margy gasped and began to read rapidly.

As she read, she punctuated with startled murmurs of "My goodness!" and "Why, isn't that awful!" and when she reached the end, her big eyes were filled with something like terror.

"Fred!" she cried. "What will Polly say? It's a terrible fire and it's burning right around Chassy! And Polly's father and mother and Ward and Jess's father and mother are right there!"

"Yes, I know," Fred nodded. "I don't know whether to say anything or not. The paper says forest fires have been burning for a week in Nova Scotia. Seems to me they ought to be putting them out by this time. What would you do, Margy—say anything?"

Fred's twin was silent for a moment.

"I don't believe I'd say anything yet," she decided. "Wait till you get another paper. Uncle Peter's weekly came yesterday and there wasn't a line in it about the fire, for I read it through. You don't have to be afraid Polly or any of the others will see a paper until the next weekly comes; but you get another to-morrow in Hayville and see what it says."

Fred had a good deal of respect for Margy's judgment, and now he determined to do as she suggested. They carefully hid the tell-tale paper behind one of the rafters in the loft and descended the ladder.

"I feel as though we'd been doing something wrong, don't you?" said Margy, as they reached the barn floor.

"Well, we haven't. And we can't go around looking like a funeral, you know," Fred retorted. "Say, I do believe it is beginning to rain! I hope it pours!"

Margy echoed his wish, for she knew he was

thinking of the forest fires reported to be raging in Nova Scotia and now threatening to wipe out a number of lumber towns in its path. Chassy was directly in the line of danger, according to the newspaper account.

The rain sent the others scurrying home from the Meadows' farm, and many were the exclamations of delight and thankfulness.

"I never thought I'd say I was glad to see it rain," said Jess. "But the grass in the orchard is beginning to burn and even I can see that the country needs rain."

"I hope it pours for three days," said Barry fervently. "We need a good soaking storm to fill the wells and feed the springs. Yes, sir, I wouldn't care if it rained a week. Got plenty to do to keep me busy indoors."

It was, Polly announced, an ideal time to hold a meeting of the Riddle Club. Polly was so gay and so filled with vim that Fred found himself wondering if perhaps he hadn't dreamed about the forest fires. Then his thoughts flew to the paper hidden in the hayloft and he remembered whole sentences that told him he was not dreaming.

"We don't want to meet in the barn," he said, when Polly suggested that place. "Let's go up attic and listen to the rain on the roof."

Fred had no intention of having any one come upon his paper hidden behind the rafter. It was not likely that it would be discovered, even if the Riddle Club should meet in the loft, but it was safer to take no chances with the bright eyes of Artie roving about.

The attic was voted a fine place, and soon after the mid-day dinner, the members of the Riddle Club trooped upstairs, the patter of the rain sounding loud in their ears as soon as they opened the door that shut off the stairs from the rest of the house.

"It certainly is some place!" said Ward, as he dropped down on a pile of magazines to get his breath.

The attic extended the full width and length of the farmhouse. It had innumerable windows set under the eaves and was immaculately swept and dusted and in perfect order as far as its furnishings went. Trunks and boxes and barrels and rows of papers and magazines were placed in neat rows. Peter Pepps declared that Carpathia went up daily to sweep up the shells of the nuts left by the squirrels. There was a small heap of nuts left under one of the windows every year, for the benefit of the gray squirrels that ran in and out whenever they pleased and were very much at home.

"We're forgetting something," said Ward, when Polly had called the meeting to order and it developed that no unfinished business was to be considered. "Fred hasn't opened his mouth about dues."

"Maybe he's sick," Artie observed wickedly.

Poor Fred had never once thought of asking for dues. His mind was busy with the secret and at times he scarcely heard what the others were saying.

"We won't collect any dues this time," he managed to announce, and at this Ward and Artie rolled over on the floor and "played dead" with their arms and legs sticking up pathetically.

"He needs medicine. Feel him, Margy, and see if he hasn't got a fever," urged Ward.

"Let him alone," said Margy, whose nerves were edgy, too. "Ask a riddle, Ward, and don't be so silly."

"All right—listen," Ward replied. "This is a new one—bet you never heard it, 'cause Barry told it to me. There is something in the field which, if you give it hay it will live, if you give it water, it will die. What is it?"

"Cows," said Artie, beaming blissfully.

"Does a cow die if you give it water?" Ward demanded scornfully.

"Crickets?" guessed Polly. "Maybe they don't eat hay," she hastened to qualify. "But I think if you poured a lot of water on them, you would drown them."

"You're wrong," Ward answered. "Come on, Fred—hay makes it live and water makes it die. It's awfully easy. Can't you guess?"

Fred made an honest effort to think.

"Why couldn't it be snakes or bugs?" he said.

"Because it isn't," was Ward's retort.

"I think it's an awfully silly riddle," said Margy crossly.

"That's because you can't guess it," Ward flung at her. "You haven't any brains——"

"Don't squabble," begged Polly. "Let me have another guess, Ward. It lives on hay and dies with water—what can it be? And in the field, too. I wish I could think."

"Well, hay would make it grow and water would kill it anywhere," Ward offered helpfully. "It doesn't have to be in a field, Polly."

Artie suddenly came out of one of his long silences.

"I'll bet you I know what it is," he announced brightly. "Barry didn't tell me, either! But one night he was talking to us about the time he burned brush and it got away from him—the fire, I mean

—and spread all across the hayfield. It's fire that lives on hay and is killed with water, isn't it, Ward?"

Before Ward could acquiesce, Margy jumped to her feet.

"I hate riddles!" she cried passionately. "I'm sick and tired of them and I'm going downstairs. This attic is so gloomy it gives me the creeps."

"My goodness," the astonished Artie murmured to his sister. "Maybe you'd better feel of Margy, too. Perhaps she and Fred have the measles or something!"

CHAPTER XXIV

DAYS TO BE ENDURED

By supper time Margy had recovered from her petulance and the rainy evening was pleasantly spent playing games in which Uncle Peter and Aunt Jennie joined. But that night Margy lay awake long after Polly and Jess were asleep and Fred was up an hour earlier than usual the next morning.

What excuse was he to make for wishing to go to town in that driving downpour? he wondered.

It had rained steadily throughout the night and was still raining at breakfast time. Fred confided to Margy, when he met his twin alone in one of the halls, that he was on pins and needles.

"I've got to get hold of another paper," he said. "Uncle Peter will think I'm crazy if I go over to town a day like this."

"Maybe they'll need something," Margy offered wisely.

And, as luck would have it, Aunt Jennie—the children never thought of her as Mrs. Pepps now—“ran out” of wool for her knitting.

"I would have said sure I had two hanks more on the closet shelf, but I haven't got a single strand," she mourned. "It does provoke me so, because a day like this I could knit half a sweater."

"I'll go and get you the wool," Fred said quickly. "I feel just like taking a walk."

Mrs. Pepps declared that she wouldn't think of asking any one to go to town in the pouring rain, but Fred wheedled, and finally she consented.

Fred was in a fever of impatience to be off, but he had to wait patiently while his hostess hustled around and found an old hat for him to wear and a pair of rubber boots that had been left at the farm by some youthful visitor two years before.

When he was at last out on the road, Fred breathed a sigh of relief and found it actually comforting to breast the wind and the rain and plow steadily along the muddy roadway. Several teams passed him and offered him a lift, but he wanted to walk and have time to think, so refused to ride.

He made for the paper store as soon as he reached Hayville, and there a great disappointment awaited him.

"No papers came in to-day," said the proprietor. "They slip up like that every once in a while. If they miss the first train at the mailing point, it means we're out of luck. Yes, I expect

them as usual to-morrow. No, they won't be down later. If they don't come in the morning, they don't come at all."

Fred turned away, disheartened. He bought the wool mechanically and walked away without his change. The owner of the little fancy-work store called him back and thought he must be a queer, moody kind of boy.

On the way home Fred was offered a lift by a farmer in a covered wagon, and he accepted thankfully. What good did it do him to think when he had nothing to build on? He did not know whether the fire was out or whether it had gained headway. For all he could tell, Chassy might be in ashes. And Polly and Artie and Ward and Jess—how would they feel when they heard what had happened?

"Say, you don't talk much, do you?" suggested the kindly farmer. "I've asked you three questions and you haven't said a word. I turn off here."

Fred woke up, thanked the man and climbed down. He was not far from Shadybrook now, and, holding the package of wool carefully under his cape, he covered the remaining distance hurriedly.

"My, you don't know how glad I am to get this!" said Mrs. Pepps when he gave her his pur-

chase. "The other children are up in the attic—there's Margy now. Margy, what are you doing upstairs?"

Margy's eyes telegraphed a wordless message to Fred.

"We're dressing up," she said. "I came down to get a drink of water."

Fred knew he would find her waiting for him in the upper hall.

"Tell me, quick," she entreated, speaking rapidly and in a whisper. "What did the paper say about the fire?"

"There wasn't any paper—they didn't come," said Fred dully. "So I don't know whether it's better or worse."

He followed Margy upstairs, and the rest of the morning was spent hilariously trying on the queer old garments packed away in the trunks. They even came down to dinner dressed in the costumes of a by-gone day, and Carpathia declared she couldn't put her mind on the dumplings with an assembled company of such freaks waiting to be served.

After dinner the girls and the two younger boys went back to the attic to play, but Fred, instead of following them, went out into the shed where the supply of wood was kept. He meant to spend a little time by himself whittling, and when he

found the farmer there before him, he would have backed out precipitately.

"Something on your mind, Fred?" said Peter Pepps good-naturedly and speaking so casually that Fred was not even surprised. "Been noticing you weren't just yourself for a couple of days. Maybe I can help you—needn't tell me if you'd rather not."

Fred would have resented any attempt to force his confidence, but this mild invitation, coupled with the beaming good-will that was expressed in every line of the farmer's friendly face, was not to be resisted.

"It's about the folks," Fred said desperately. "I mean Mr. and Mrs. Marley and Mr. and Mrs. Larue. They're at Chassy, you know, and there's a forest fire raging all through that section."

All the twinkles went out of Peter Pepps' eyes and his face sobered.

"How did you hear?" he asked almost sharply.

Fred told him of the paper, and they went out to the barn where the stout farmer insisted on climbing the ladder to the hayloft and reading the paper himself.

"It looks kind of bad," he admitted when he had finished. "But of course we can't depend on news two days old. You say no papers came in this morning? Then there is nothing to do but

wait. In the morning Barry will be going after the corn sheller—the agent telephoned it has come—and you can go with him and get a paper. Then we'll decide what we'd better do."

"You don't think I ought to tell Polly, *do* you?" said Fred anxiously. "She worries so much and I don't know what the others would say. You see it's pretty dreadful, because we can't *do* anything."

"Most real troubles are like that," the farmer answered gravely. "You have to endure 'em and wait for better times. No, I wouldn't tell Polly or the rest just yet. Wait till we know a little more to tell. If the folks are safe—and we'll pray they are—then you'll be glad you saved them the worry. And if it is to be bad news, there will be plenty of time for them to hear it."

Fred thought that rainy afternoon the longest he had ever known. His chums tired of the dressing-up game and came downstairs to have a candy pull and torment Carpathia with riddles she couldn't guess. Just before supper the rain stopped and they all dashed out for a romp on the hay and to help Barry, who was too good-natured to admit that he could have attended to the feeding and milking more quickly with less assistance.

The next morning Fred was in despair when he found that the whole Riddle Club was set on going to town.

"We want to ride when there isn't any dust," Ward declared. "Gee, Fred, how can you be so selfish as to talk about going alone? Of course we're all going. Barry says there is plenty of room."

"You can hide the paper under the blanket," whispered Peter Pepps to Fred, drawing him aside. "Margy will help you—a girl is quick-witted about those things. None of the others need know you've bought a paper."

It was a merry drive to town, in spite of Fred's and his sister's anxiety. The others laughed and sang, and, once in Hayville, had such a variety of errands to perform that Fred was able to buy his paper and tuck it under the blanket on the front seat without being detected.

"Fred, I meant to ask you to get a paper," said Barry on the way home. "That's too bad—never thought of it till this minute. Well, guess tomorrow or the next day will be time enough."

Polly couldn't help laughing at this idea of the importance of daily news. Polly was very happy this morning, and Margy's heart ached a little whenever she looked at her. It didn't seem fair

that when people were as gay and as good and as happy as Polly that trouble should come to disturb them.

Fred's whole mind was on the paper, and Margy sacrificed her eagerness to his in one of her rare impulses of generosity. She suggested to the others that they go over and see the Meadows' colt, and Barry set them down at the lane which would take them to the Meadows' barns. Fred steadfastly resisted the pleadings of Artie and Ward that he would come too, and drove on to Shadybrook with Barry.

"Got it," he mumbled to Peter Pepps, as he came out to help unharness the horses.

Barry carried the corn sheller off to the crib and went happily to work screwing it in place, while Fred, with fingers that trembled, drew out the folded paper and scanned it eagerly.

"Oh!" he cried quickly, as his eyes fell on the first page. "Uncle Peter, look!"

There across the top of the paper were the ugly black headlines that tell of trouble and calamity. The forest fire was still raging in Nova Scotia. There was an ominous list of "towns destroyed" printed in a box.

"Chassy!" gasped Fred. "Chassy has been completely destroyed! And the wires are down so the loss of life is not known!"

"Well, Fred," the troubled farmer said, his eyes bright with pity, "we'll hope that means good news. You must remember that these towns had some warning. They knew the fire was coming, and it's likely that most of the people had time to get away."

"But a fire can surround a town," said Fred. "A fire——"

A bright figure flashed over the door sill and Polly's gay voice demanded, "What *are* you two talking about? I whistled and whistled, and you never answered. Let me see the paper, Fred. I want to read the weather report."

Fred, panic-stricken, did the worst thing he could have done. He thrust the paper behind him.

"Fred Williamson, what is in that paper?" demanded Polly, her voice shaking. "What are you keeping back?"

Fred, who could never get used to the quick deductions of the feminine mind, looked appealingly at his accomplice.

"Better let her see it, Fred," advised the farmer calmly. "Might as well know it now."

Polly was frightened, but she took the paper Fred handed her and forced herself to read where his finger pointed.

"Why, Chassy burned down," she said in a

curiously still voice. "Why—why, Fred, Mother and Father are there! And Mr. and Mrs. Larue! They *said* they were going to Chassy!"

"Now, Polly, we're going to hope that they're all right," Fred told her soothingly. "You see, Uncle Peter says they probably had plenty of time to leave before the fire reached there. We'll get a wire saying they are all right—you'll see."

But though Polly promised "not to make a fuss," she was sick with anxiety, and the good farmer and his wife shared her worry. It was impossible to keep the news from the others, and Jess clung to Polly pathetically, while Ward and Artie were so anxious not to talk about the fire that they found themselves imagining the most gruesome details every time they attempted to start a cheerful conversation. The first night Polly and Jess talked in whispers till nearly morning, and when they went down to breakfast the first thing they saw was the weekly paper, to which the Pepps subscribed, with an account of the fire and pictures of the ruined towns.

CHAPTER XXV

GOOD NEWS AT LAST

THE next few days were exceedingly trying, both for the worried Marleys and Larues and for their friends, who would have given anything to have been able to help them. Fred trudged valiantly to Hayville every morning to get a daily paper, but though each member of the household at Shadybrook searched the columns separately, they could find nothing definite regarding the fate of the inhabitants of the smaller towns in the path of the fire. The flames were reported under control on the third day, but the dispatches remained silent on the subject of Chassy and its residents.

"We could go home—maybe we ought to," said Polly to Margy one beautiful clear morning.

The two girls were waiting for Fred and Ward, who had driven into the town with Barry. Jess was in bed, where she had remained that morning because Mrs. Pepps insisted on it. Jess, between grief and a lively imagination, was rapidly working herself up to a point where her nerves would

give way completely. Mrs. Pepps had recognized this, and, under threat of forcing her to see a doctor, had persuaded Jess to stay quietly in her room.

"I don't see what good it would do you to go home," protested Margy. "There's no one there. You'd feel worse in an empty house, wouldn't you, Polly?"

"I suppose so," Polly sighed. "But I was talking to Aunt Jennie about it last night. If—if there was any news, it would come to River Bend."

Margy considered this point.

"You mean you don't think your mother ever got the letter from my mother telling them we were coming to Shadybrook?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Polly miserably. "That's the worst of it—I don't know. All we've had was the two letters from Halifax, telling us they were going to Chassy, and those were forwarded from River Bend."

"What did Aunt Jennie say about going back to River Bend?"

"She said if it would make me any happier or help me any, she and Uncle Peter would take us all home and open the house. But she doesn't think it wise to upset Jess any more than we have to—and I suppose we can wait here as well as anywhere."

Margy put her arm around Polly—dear Polly who in the last few days had lost all her sparkle and whose usually smiling mouth drooped pitifully.

“Don’t worry, Polly Prim,” crooned Margy, with an affectionate hug. “If something dreadful had happened to the folks, we should have heard of it the first thing. It’s because there is nothing to tell that we can’t find any news in the paper.”

Margy and Fred were doing their loyal best to keep up the spirits of their friends, and now as the wagon came rattling down the road, Fred called considerately as soon as he saw Polly:

“Not a line about Nova Scotia this morning—that means the fire is all out.”

Ward, his round face sadly sobered, climbed down after Fred and handed Polly the paper.

“There’s nothing in it,” he said. “We all looked. Jess all right?”

“She’s asleep,” Margy assured him, for Polly, in spite of Fred’s statement, was feverishly scanning the pages.

Around the corner of the house scuffled Artie. His blue eyes were full of trouble, but no one had yet seen him cry.

“Postman’s coming,” he said gruffly. “I saw him from the window in the hayloft. He’ll be here in a minute.”

The news of the trouble at Shadybrook Farm had spread throughout the countryside and many were the telephone calls that Mrs. Pepps answered. Every one was very sorry for the young visitors, and the first remark the mail carrier made, when he drove up a few moments later, showed where his thoughts were.

"Hope I've brought you good news," he said. "There's a letter for you, Fred. Post-marked Brisband—that's out West. Isn't that where the folks who were in the fire are?"

Polly's heart had given a great leap at his first words, but now it was beating normally again. Brisband was where Mrs. Williamson's mother lived.

Excited a little, in spite of his knowledge that the letter could not possibly be from the travelers in Nova Scotia, Fred tore open the envelope and hastily read the contents.

"They're coming home!" he said. "The company won their lawsuit on Dad's testimony and they're going to start for River Bend a week from to-morrow."

"Don't they say anything about the fire?" Ward asked anxiously.

Fred shook his head.

"If I were you," said the mail carrier suddenly, "I'd send 'em a telegram. Like as not they can

communicate with your folks in Nova Scotia. Tell your father what's up, Fred, and see if he doesn't do something."

The carrier had to drive on, but Fred flew into the house, Polly and Margy and Ward and Artie after him, demanding a pencil and paper. Mrs. Pepps, when she heard of the telegram suggestion, added her approval and with the assistance of the entire family, a message was drawn up and telephoned to the station agent who promised to send it at once.

"Don't say a word to Jess," cautioned Mrs. Pepps. "I've just got her quieted down a little, and it would be cruel to start her worrying again. There isn't a thing any one can do till we hear from that wire. If you'll take my advice, you'll go out and help Uncle Peter pick up the apples and talk about the location of Zanzibar—anything to keep your mind off this for a while."

The young people recognized the wisdom in Aunt Jennie's homely advice, and they did go out to the orchard where Peter Pepps and Barry were sorting the late apples.

It was difficult, even in great trouble, not to be influenced by the wind and the sun or to resist the magic of red and gold apples piled at the foot of rows of gray trees. Every one of the children was sure that it would be impossible to

think of a thing but the return telegram, but in less than ten minutes they were counting apples so intently that not another thought was in their minds.

As they counted and sorted, Mr. Pepps told odd little stories of his experiences in the city commission markets, and Barry, from time to time, added a word or two picturing his boyhood experiences on his father's farm, and before any one was ready to believe it, the cheerful sound of the old-fashioned dinner bell, rung by Carpathia, was calling them to the noon dinner.

"I'll feed afterward," said Barry, glancing at the bright faces around him. "We could finish this afternoon if we had some help."

Peter Pepps laughed a little.

"I call that a pretty broad hint," he declared.

"We'll help," chorused the Riddle Club. "Of course we will! It's nice to sort apples, Barry."

As they walked to the house, Artie studied Barry carefully.

"You said you'd feed afterward, Barry," he reminded the hired man. "But you're going right into the kitchen."

"I meant the stock—not me," Barry explained. "Did you think I'd put off eating Carpathia's apple pie?"

The rest found themselves laughing for the first

time in a number of days at Artie's mistake, and Mrs. Pepps noted with satisfaction that they all ate with better appetites.

"I'll stay in and listen for the 'phone," she said in an aside to Polly, as the apple pickers prepared to return to the orchard, having done justice to Carpathia's best efforts.

Jess had been allowed to dress and come down to dinner, and now she begged so hard to be allowed to go with the others that Mrs. Pepps consented.

They were sorting apples busily when an hour or two later Polly straightened up to ease a little kink in her back. Her glance fell on Mrs. Pepps crossing the bit of meadow between the house and the orchard. The good woman was evidently hurrying, and Polly's heart began to beat wildly.

"Look!" she cried, half unconsciously.

Every one stared, and when they saw that Mrs. Pepps was waving a piece of paper Artie began to shout.

"She's got it!" he screamed. "Look, she's got it! The answer to the telephone!"

"What telephone?" asked Jess, but no one heard her. No one stopped to tell Artie that he meant telegram and not telephone. No one stopped for anything. Pell-mell, they began to

run. They met Mrs. Pepps at the edge of the orchard.

"It's all right!" she gasped. "Jasper called me up just a minute ago. He read me the telegram, and I wrote it down for you. Here, Fred—I'm all out of breath."

Fred took the bit of paper and read the message aloud.

"All safe in Nova Scotia. Chassy badly damaged, but no lives lost. Heard direct two days ago. Didn't think the news would reach you. Home next Thursday—Dad."

The Riddle Club members laughed a little—that is, the boys did. They cried a little—that is, the girls did. Mrs. Pepps cried with them. Then they had to explain to Jess, and presently they all drifted back to their places under the trees.

"What makes me tired," said Artie, biting into an apple with great gusto, "is that about not knowing the news would reach us. Huh!"

"Yes, you might think we were off the face of the earth!" Fred grumbled.

"Stop crabbing," commanded Ward, his face alight with mischief. "Put your wits to work and solve a riddle—I've got a peach of a riddle."

They laughed at the familiar expression, and

Fred bounced an apple off the fat boy's head, informing him that he was William Tell.

"Let's hear the riddle, Ward," said Polly, in whose shining eyes the old happy light was brightly kindled.

"Well, I'll have to think of it again," Ward mumbled. "Fred acts so silly he knocks all my ideas out of my head."

Peter Pepps and his wife looked at each other and laughed. They were glad to hear this kind of talk again—they knew the Riddle Club members were fondest of each other and most at peace with the world when they sounded as though they might be "squabbling."

"Hurry up," urged Artie. "Or I'll tell one."

"You let Ward alone—he's telling a riddle," said Margy sternly.

"I've got it!" Ward announced, taking a deep breath.

"When is a quart of milk not a quart?" he demanded.

"Easy," spoke up Jess. "When it is evaporated."

"Good for you, Jess!" Mrs. Pepps patted her hand approvingly.

"But that isn't right," protested Ward. "That isn't the answer, I mean."

246 RIDDLE CLUB AT SHADYBROOK

"Yes, it is! I read it in a book!" Artie almost glared in his excitement.

"I can't help where you read it! It isn't the answer," insisted Ward.

"I read something like that too," Barry interposed.

"Well, what is the answer?" asked Polly gently. "We're too happy to be very patient, Ward. You'll have to tell us."

"A quart of milk isn't a quart of milk when it's condensed," said Ward firmly.

"Same thing," Fred informed the fat boy kindly.

"No, it isn't—one has sugar in it and the other hasn't," declared Ward.

"Speaking of milk reminds me of—never mind that. When was beef at its highest?" drawled Barry, tying the last apple sack expertly.

"When the cow jumped over the moon," shouted the Riddle Club.

And, laughing and arguing, they strolled slowly back to the house to make ready for supper.

THE END

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